

## MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES



*Creating safe and healthy spaces for survivors  
and advocates working with survivors*

**Length of time for complete module content:** 1.5-2 Hours

**Module learning goal:** Advocates engage in ethical practice

**Competency Learning Objectives Covered:**

- Define ethical principles and responsibilities for advocates.
- Describe boundaries and identify boundary violations.

# OPENING EXERCISE



Confidential Sexual Violence Advocate Training - Boundaries & Ethical Practice



*NOTE: This content may be best situated after an introductory overview of concepts such as culture, personal and social values, and oppression. This could also accompany discussions of cultural humility and/or role plays.*

# ETHICS IN ADVOCACY

## Boundaries

- Professional/Volunteer responsibilities
- Crisis intervention
- Role within the SART response

Established to build trust and support for the victim



Confidential Sexual Violence Advocate Training - Boundaries & Ethical Practice

### Learning objectives addressed

Define ethical principles and responsibilities for advocates

### Training notes

- Boundaries are not just about our comfort levels or needs – they are also in place to help maintain consistency in services.
- There is a distinction between *personal values* and *professional ethics*. Advocates have “professional” responsibilities as they function on behalf of a sexual violence program or organization. Something may seem like “the right thing to do,” but will be a violation of professional ethics. We’ll talk about this some more in a little bit.

### **•Discussion Questions:**

- What role do you think boundaries play in an advocate’s role?
- How can boundaries be helpful?

# FAIRNESS

Treating all survivors with respect and excellence

- Anti-oppression framework
- Cultural humility
- **ALL** options and possibilities

Addressing personal experiences, (mis)perceptions, and possible biases

Texas Association Against Sexual Assault. (2013). *Sexual assault advocate training manual*, Sixth revision. Austin, TX: TAASA.



Confidential Sexual Violence Advocate Training - Boundaries & Ethical Practice

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Define ethical principles and responsibilities for advocates

## Training notes

- Something being “fair” may seem subjective, but advocates must strive to maintain a balance in their conduct. Related to the values and ethics concept, fairness is about approaching each victim and situation with personal awareness.
- Personal awareness:
  - Biases and personal experiences with a certain set of conditions or with a certain group of people
  - Misperceptions about sexual violence and trauma
  - Feeling confident in presenting ALL of the options to a survivor, regardless of how you may feel or want a survivor or behave

# FLEXIBILITY

What's best for the victim?

- Communication style
- Setting
- Being present and taking a moment to breathe

What can the advocate do to promote those needs and make change where needed?

Texas Association Against Sexual Assault. (2013). *Sexual assault advocate training manual, Sixth revision*. Austin, TX: TAASA.



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## Training notes

- Flexibility is our readiness to alter our approach or step outside of our comfort zone in order to elevate a survivor's needs or wishes.
- Flexibility in practice:
  - Changing communication style (e.g. talking with hands, making eye contact)
  - Where are you speaking with the advocate? Is it private/unwelcoming/unfamiliar?
  - Are YOU breathing and maintaining an awareness of your body?
- How can we alter the course in the midst of everything?
  - Checking in the victim to see if we're hearing things accurately
  - Active listening
  - Advocating within other SART members

## ADVOCACY IS NOT...

### ...being a friend

- Advocacy is goal-oriented
- Advocacy is not casual or informal

### ...being a therapist

- Advocacy is not therapeutic
- Advocacy is about being supportive

### ...being a crusader or rescuer

- Advocacy is about the victim's needs and frame of reference

Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault. (2011). *Sexual assault advocacy and crisis line training guide*. Denver, CO: Karen Moldovan, Ed.



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Define ethical principles and responsibilities for advocates

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- What brought you to volunteer or attend this training?
- What is advocacy?

#### **Training notes**

- Friendship “vs” advocacy
  - Mutual information-sharing and intimacy
  - Vulnerability on behalf of both individuals
  - Advocacy has a power dynamic – one person (the advocate) is there to provide support, resources, and systematic response to the other’s (the victim) needs.
- Therapy “vs” advocacy
  - Longer-term process of healing through a set of evidence-based or researched methods
  - Therapists have specific training and education to address mental health needs and trauma
  - Advocacy is specific to a moment in time – a crisis – and the primary goal is to lessen the negative impacts of that moment and provide options to the person experiencing the crisis.
- Rescuing “vs” advocacy
  - The Rescuer or Crusader is central or the focus of decision-making
  - Advocacy is all about the victim – experiences, needs, and strengths.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- (For each bullet point)
  - How could this be harmful to a survivor?
  - How could this be harmful to an advocate?



### **Training notes**

- We'll be looking at specific scenarios and possibilities that could push our boundaries as an advocate
- This is an opportunity for us to work through these issues
  - There are some desired responses that will help inform our practice
  - This space is where we can answer the "Why" and "How" of ethical practice

*FACILITATOR NOTE: These scenarios are intended to guide discussion of ethics and boundaries within a SART or hotline response. Feel free to modify or add to these scenarios in a way that will help promote discussions and skill-building.*



## RELATIONSHIP & RESPONSIBILITY

As a survivor is sharing his experience, an advocate is recalling elements of his assault. The advocate feels compelled to tell the victim his story as a way to promote hope and healing.



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Define ethical principles and responsibilities for advocates.  
Describe boundaries and identify boundary violations.

### **Training notes**

- There are many different types of boundaries to maintain for advocates, one of which is **self-disclosure**. Self-disclosure is sharing personal information that takes healing time or space away from the client's needs.
  - Obviously, a certain degree of self-disclosure is needed and often helpful in building trust and rapport with a survivor. However, self-disclosures can also be harmful or damaging - self-disclosures can distract the client from his/her experience and being present. The dynamic may change from survivor-centered to advocate-centered.
  - Before disclosing personal information about yourself to the client, ask yourself who you are doing it for and what purpose it serves. Is it to make yourself the center of the conversation, to make the process move faster, or to provide information and support to the survivor?
- Self-care and supervision for advocates who are survivors
  - Connecting with program staff or supervisor when triggered or connecting with a victim's experience
  - Supervision is crucial to ethical practice

### ***• Discussion Questions:***

- Boundaries
  - What are some of the responsibilities functioning within this scenario?
  - How/Would the situation change if this was a hotline call?
- Fairness
  - Does the gender of the survivor impact the response? What misperceptions, assumptions, or biases are functioning here?
  - How can the advocate become present again and perhaps set aside their own victimization as they respond to this crisis?
- Flexibility
  - Which response would be the most appropriate to the survivor?

## RELATIONSHIP & RESPONSIBILITY

A survivor loses her ride home after the interview and forensic exam processes are delayed. She is exhausted and drained. The advocate asks where the survivor was going to get a ride to and it turns out to be minutes from the advocate's home.



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### **Training notes**

- There are many different types of boundaries to maintain for advocates, one of which is **over-helping**. Over-helping is when advocates step outside their role as an advocate to assist a survivor in a way that is not related to the intervention. Examples of over-helping may include babysitting or watching a victim's child or children (beyond client's need for childcare when at office for counseling appointment), giving out cell phone numbers, or communicating with a survivor beyond the scope of a crisis intervention or SART response.
- As advocates, we often want to do whatever we can to help our clients. However, over-helping may not actually help. It may cause damage because, even if done with good intentions, there is potential for exploitation because of power dynamics. Advocates have access to information about the victim and may feel compelled to help in whatever way they can. It is important to remember **boundaries ensure space for survivors to heal and regain a sense of power**.
- Supervision is crucial to ethical practice – if/when over-helping occurs or could occur, talk it over with program staff or supervisor to develop a plan for course-correcting

### **•Discussion Questions:**

- Boundaries
  - What are some of the responsibilities functioning within this scenario?
- Fairness
  - Does the gender of the survivor impact the response?
- Flexibility
  - Which response would be the most appropriate to the survivor?

## RELATIONSHIP & RESPONSIBILITY

A member of the SART response is having a terrible day and has snapped at the survivor multiple times throughout the process. The advocate notices this and is irritated by it. After a particularly tense exchange, the victim turns to the advocate and says, "That person is such a jerk, don't you think?!"



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### Training notes

- Advocates are part of a team – success is dependent on trust and respect.
- Even if it may not be true at the moment, presenting a united and confident front will help survivors feel supported.
- Our personal frustrations cannot become a part of the survivor's experience.
- The scenarios so far highlight some of the differences between *personal values* and *professional ethics*. An advocate may want to disclose their experience, drive a survivor home, or agree about a colleague's conduct, but as a representative of an agency and multidisciplinary response, they must hold themselves to a different standard.

### **•Discussion Questions:**

- Boundaries
  - What are some of the responsibilities functioning within this scenario?
    - Responsibilities as an advocate?
    - Responsibilities as a SART member and partner?
- Fairness
  - Does the gender of the survivor or SART member impact the response?
- Flexibility
  - Which response would be the most appropriate to the survivor?

# CONFIDENTIALITY

During a SART response review, the advocate remembers hearing the victim mention she put a crucial piece of evidence in the hamper. The victim is cooperating with law enforcement, but has not mentioned the potential evidence to the detective. The advocate thinks the evidence may not have been cleaned yet.



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## **Training notes**

- Confidentiality is a building block of trust between an advocate and victim. That trust and respect should not be broken unless there is documentation of confidentiality being waived.
- Advocates elevate the voices of victims and promote their decisions. Making assumptions about intentions or wishes takes power away from the victim.

## **Discussion Questions:**

- Boundaries
  - What are some of the responsibilities functioning within this scenario?
  - Should the advocate give law enforcement the information even though a confidentiality waiver was not signed by the victim?
- Flexibility
  - Which response would be the most appropriate to the survivor?
  - Is there ever a time when advocates can assume what a victim may want?

## INTERPRETERS

A victim being interviewed by a detective with the assistance of an interpreter. A bilingual advocate is also present during the interview and realizes the interpreter did not translate an element of the victim's experience accurately.



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### **Training notes**

- Interpreters are trained professionals who have passed a series of exams to become qualified or certified interpreters. Their conversations are kept confidential and they have a set of professional responsibilities. Interpreters working with law enforcement and in the judicial system often have training on legal terminology and processes. Interpreters working with detectives or prosecutor's offices are focused on gathering the facts of the case in order to help the investigation proceed.
- Bilingual advocates are dedicated and trained volunteers whose primary focus is the needs of a victim in crisis. Bilingual advocates are integral to a culturally-relevant and specific response to survivors in need of support and resources.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Boundaries
  - What are some of the responsibilities functioning within this scenario?
  - What role would the advocate be stepping into if they were to interrupt the interpreter or interview?
- Fairness
  - What if the advocate does not speak the same dialect as the victim and/or interpreter?
- Flexibility
  - Which response would be the most appropriate to the survivor?
  - Is there ever a time when advocates can assume what a victim may want?

## WITNESSES

A victim confides to an advocate that there was a witness to the sexual assault but does not want to tell law enforcement because the witness is undocumented.



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### **Training notes**

- Advocates promote the needs and wishes of the victim.
- Confidentiality is crucial to maintain trust (as mentioned).

### ***•Discussion Questions:***

- Boundaries
  - What are some of the responsibilities functioning within this scenario?
  - What role would the advocate be stepping into if they were to report the existence of the witness and/or their immigrant status?
- Fairness
  - How may fears of deportation or disruption in the support network impact a victim in crisis?
- Flexibility
  - Which response would be the most appropriate to the survivor?

## QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?



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