

# **CODE OF ETHICS**

## **Specialized Victim Assistance Programs**

**Final Draft**

**Prepared for the BC Ministry of Attorney General by the:**



**BC Association of  
Specialized Victim  
Assistance &  
Counselling Programs**

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## Specialized Victim Assistance Program: Draft Code of Ethics

### PREAMBLE

#### **Purpose**

*The intent of the Specialized Victim Assistance Program Code of Ethics is to provide a comprehensive set of ethical principles to help guide Specialized Victim Assistance workers in their relationships with clients, colleagues, governing agencies, the criminal justice system and the public. As well as providing a means for self-appraisal, the Code provides a written framework for demonstrating accountability to clients and the wider public.*

#### **Scope and Application**

*The Code provides guidance to SVAP workers and addresses the ethical dimensions of existing SVAP activities, policies, standards and operating guidelines (described in detail within other program documents such as SVAP Program Standards and Records Management Guidelines).*

*In some cases, SVAP workers may also be governed by other agency or professional Codes of Ethics. It is anticipated that the principles in the SVAP Code of Ethics will be congruent with these, however, if ethical policies and principles in these Codes apply, they are considered to take precedence. If conflicts in ethical principles in different Codes arise they should be brought forward and resolved.*

*It is recognized that a Code of Ethics is an “evolving” document which may change emphasis or add provisions over time. Ethical issues and situations may also arise in SVAP programs which are not directly dealt with in this document. It is the intent that this document provide a framework and broad ethical principles that could be used in a range of situations. To assist with ethical decision making, a step-by-step process for reviewing and addressing ethical issues is also included (Appendix I).*

*This document was prepared for the Ministry of Attorney General by the British Columbia Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs*

## **UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES**

The Specialized Victim Assistance Program is based on the following principles, which are reflected in this Code of Ethics.

- **Competence:** Specialized Victim Assistance workers perform their work with a high level of skills and competence.
- **Professional Integrity:** SVAP workers aspire to embody the quality of integrity in their work with clients, colleagues and the public. Integrity is comprised of fairness, honesty, openness and avoidance of conflict of interest.
- **Respect for the Differences and Rights of Others:** Worker-client relationships are based on an understanding of the equal worth of human beings and on respect for individual differences. Workers avoid bias, show respect for diversity and demonstrate a welcoming attitude to clients from all cultures and backgrounds.
- **Empowerment of Clients:** SVAP workers are committed to assisting clients to make their own decisions on the basis of information and support. Worker-client relationships are oriented towards building client self-confidence and self-esteem and encouraging a sense of empowerment.
- **Social Responsibility:** Workers accept that supporting or facilitating social change is part of an ethical commitment. Social responsibility involves identifying and, where feasible, taking steps to address situations where abuse, human suffering or oppression occurs within and outside the workplace.

## **CODE OF ETHICS**

Specialized victim assistance workers subscribe to the following tenets.

### **1.0 Mandate and Role**

#### ***Overall Mandate***

17.1 The mandate of SVAP workers is to provide a range of practical assistance, support, information and advocacy services to assist clients in the recovery process and in coming to terms with the effects of being victimized.

#### ***Scope and Emphasis of Services***

17.2 The primary obligation of SVAP workers is to clients except when client actions or statements clearly represent a risk to themselves or others who are vulnerable (e.g., children).

17.3 The services offered by SVAP workers consist of practical assistance, referrals, crisis responses, emotional support, information and advocacy services rather than counselling, treatment or therapy.

### **2.0 Philosophy of Services**

#### ***Empowerment***

17.1 SVAP workers believe in the strength and capacity of their clients and support client empowerment by validating client decision making.

17.2 SVAP workers recognize, support and validate their clients' life experiences and perspectives although there is an obligation to point out if and when their beliefs or actions may jeopardize their own safety or the safety of others who are vulnerable (e.g., children).

#### ***Trust and Respect***

17.3 SVAP services are provided in an ethical and authentic way, embodying the characteristics of fairness, honesty, integrity and empathy.

17.4 Workers treat clients with trust, dignity and respect and attempt to reduce power differentials in the worker-client relationships as much as possible.

### ***Respect for Uniqueness and Differences***

17.5 SVAP workers understand, recognize and value the uniqueness of, and differences between, clients. All clients, regardless of their culture, race, background, gender, age, ability, class or sexual orientation are treated with respect and understanding (see Section 4.0 Respect for Diversity).

### ***Responsibility and Accountability***

17.6 SVAP workers hold offenders responsible both for the crimes they commit and their impact on those who have been victimized. The obligation of SVAP workers is to help clients understand where this responsibility belongs and to avoid self-blame.

## **3.0 Relationships with Clients**

(see also 16.0 Conflict of Interest and Avoidance of Dual Relationships)

### ***Personal and Professional Boundaries***

17.1 SVAP workers recognize their distinct roles and professional obligations to clients and are clear about their personal and professional boundaries.

17.2 Where some level of social or non-professional clients in a non-work setting may be unavoidable, (e.g., in small community setting), SVAP workers:

- Recognize potential conflicts in these relationships and make them specifically known to program supervisors;
- Do not discuss or divulge program-related or client information.

### ***Intimate (Sexual) Relationships***

17.3 SVAP workers do not form sexual relationships with clients to whom they are providing program support, services or resources.

- 17.4 Unless it is unavoidable (i.e., in a small community), SVAP workers do not provide program services to clients with whom they have had an intimate relationship.
- 17.5 As a general principle, SVAP workers should not have intimate (sexual) relationships with people to whom they have provided direct, ongoing SVAP services in the past. If a sexual relationship does take place it should not do so within a minimum of 2 years after the worker-client relationship has been terminated. SVAP workers who are involved in such relationships have the obligation of determining that the relationship is not exploitive or based on vulnerable status of the (previous) client.

### ***Continuity / Termination of Program Services***

- 17.6 SVAP workers recognize the importance of providing continuous and consistent services and make provisions to cover any staffing changes or interruptions that occur.
- 17.7 Termination of program services takes into account both the client's needs and the program's capacity, mandate and funding.
- 17.8 Prior to the termination of services, the client's views and needs are discussed and appropriate resources and referrals provided.

## **4.0 Respect for Diversity**

### ***Worker Awareness and Sensitivity***

- 17.1 SVAP workers are aware of the meaning and potential impacts of their own ethno-cultural background, class, gender and sexual orientation.
- 17.2 SVAP workers actively attempt to understand the background and experiences of clients and others with whom they work.
- 17.3 SVAP workers evaluate their own practice and interactions on an ongoing basis and take steps to change any negative or stereotypical biases that exist.

### ***Inclusivity of Services***

- 17.4 SVAP workers provide services, resources and information *without discrimination* on the basis of race, colour, age, gender, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, marital status, religion or political beliefs, mental or physical abilities or any other preferences, characteristics or status.
- 17.5 SVAP workers avoid language which suggests or promotes stereotypes, reinforces victimization and/or the marginalization of clients.
- 17.6 SVAP workers respect varying types of families and family structures that are practised in different cultures, in same sex relationships, and in different living arrangements.
- 17.7 SVAP workers act to prevent or eliminate discrimination in SVAP program or personnel policies.

## **5.0 Ethical Issues**

### ***Adherence to Ethical Principles***

- 17.1 SVAP workers are familiar with, understand, and follow the principles and intent of the SVAP Code of Ethics unless an agency or professional Code of Ethics overrules these principles.

### ***Resolving Ethical Issues***

- 17.2 SVAP workers cooperate fully with any formal ethics investigations that may be required.
- 17.3 An attempt is made to resolve any ethical issues which arise within the organization or with clients or colleagues in an informal way before proceeding with formal methods (see Steps for Resolving Ethical Dilemmas or Concerns: Appendix I).

## 6.0 Client Consent to Services, Confidentiality and Privacy

### *Client Consent*

17.1 Clients are informed of the purpose, scope and contents of SVAP services at the outset of service delivery.

17.2 Service use is completely voluntary: clients can accept or reject any services or resources suggested by SVAP workers.

### *Consent of Minors*

17.3 SVAP workers follow agency protocols for providing services to minors (ages 12-18) where parental consent is not available (see Specialized Victim Assistance Program Service Delivery Standards, Section 15: Services to Children).

### *Confidentiality and Privacy*

17.4 Client records and information are not shared with others unless (written) client consent is provided or unless specific exceptions to confidentiality apply. These exceptions are set out in the SVAP Program Standards and include:

- Situations or circumstances where the client is evaluated by the program as being of danger to self and others;
- Situations or circumstances where a child has been or is likely to be harmed (see Section 8.0);
- Situations where information is ordered by a court to be released.

Upon written request from a Child Protection Worker SVP workers will disclose any information to assist in the assessment of the safety of a child.

17.5 Clients are fully informed if and when any of the exceptions to confidentiality (as noted in 6.4) have been made.

## 7.0 Client Files and Records

### *Quality of Records*

17.1 SVAP workers are responsible for developing and maintaining records that are professional, legible, objective and current.

### *Client Access to Files*

17.2 Clients are provided access\* to information in program records which relate directly to them.

### *Security and Protection of Files*

17.3 SVAP workers create, maintain, store and dispose of client written and electronic records in ways which protect client privacy and are in accordance with agency records management policies.

### *Removal of Files*

17.4 SVAP workers do not remove client files or records from SVAP premises unless this is specifically related to the provision of services to clients.

## 8.0 Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

17.1 SVAP workers are obligated to report promptly (or see that a report is made) to a Ministry for Children and Families child protection worker if a child has been or is likely to be, physically harmed, sexually abused or sexually exploited by a parent or other person, or needs protection in circumstances where his/her safety has been or might be jeopardized due to neglect, abandonment, lack of access to medical treatment, conduct of parents or illness or death of parents.\*\*

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\* Access may consist of a review of completed records, notes or copies. The format provided may also be determined by agency policy. Original records remain the property of the Specialized Victim Assistance administering agency.

\*\*Although this clause reflects the B.C. Child, Family and Community Services Act, a review of issues relating to its interpretation and implementation is now underway.

## 9.0 Workplace Issues

### *Performance of Work*

17.1 SVAP workers abide by all SVAP program policies, protocols, guidelines and standards.

17.2 SVAP workers attend all required meetings and perform all functions which are related to the performance of SVAP duties.

### *Workplace conditions*

17.3 SVAP workers work for the creation and maintenance of workplace conditions that are consistent with SVAP standards and the Code of Ethics.

17.4 SVAP workers work towards addressing and alleviating destructive power imbalances that exist between and within agencies, staff, volunteers and clients.

### *Relationships with Colleagues*

17.5 SVAP workers respect the rights of co-workers and treat them with fairness, courtesy and respect.

## 10.0 Worker Health

### *Health*

17.1 SVAP workers perform their duties only when they are physically, mentally or emotionally fit.

17.2 SVAP workers understand the stress related impacts of their work and take reasonable steps to address them.

## 11.0 Worker Conduct

### *Alcohol or Drug Use*

17.1 SVAP workers do not consume alcohol or mind-altering substances immediately prior to or during a shift.

### *Illegal Activities*

17.2 SVAP workers are not involved in any illegal activities.

### *Harassment*

17.3 Workers do not engage in any conduct that offends, intimidates or humiliates colleagues or clients. This includes any form of sexual harassment which is defined as physical advances, sexual solicitation, and/or verbal or non-verbal conduct that is sexual in nature, unwelcome, offensive or perceived as harassment.

## 12.0 Safety

### *Program Policies*

17.1 SVAP workers follow all safety policies, procedures and program standards required by the program and agency.

### *Client Safety*

17.2 SVAP workers are aware of and take steps to address the client's physical and emotional needs for safety.

17.3 SVAP workers do not, through their actions or opinions, jeopardize the safety of themselves, their clients or co-workers.

17.4 SVAP workers have an ethical responsibility to inform clients about decisions or actions which may jeopardize their (the client's) safety.

## 13.0 Staff Competence and Training

### *Training*

- 17.1 SVAP workers provide services within the boundaries of their training, competence and experience.
- 17.2 SVAP workers attempt to complete all victim service basic and advanced training opportunities that are made available.
- 17.3 SVAP workers continuously maintain and upgrade their knowledge of program policies, legislation, related programs and referral sources.
- 17.4 SVAP workers continuously maintain and upgrade their knowledge of the issues faced by the diverse clients they serve.

### *Staff*

- 17.5 SVAP workers identify program issues, training needs and gaps in training to their program and provincial associations on an ongoing basis.

## 14.0 Evaluation / Assessment

### *Maintenance of Records*

- 17.1 SVAP workers maintain systematic and accurate client or program records that are required for program assessment or tracking purposes.

### *Participation in Evaluation*

- 17.2 SVAP workers participate in any required evaluations or assessment processes.
- 17.3 SVAP workers monitor their own effectiveness on the job and with clients on an ongoing basis and make changes where required to improve their effectiveness.

## 15.0 Referrals

### *Requirements for Referrals*

17.1 SVAP workers recognize the needs of clients, the limitations of their skills and expertise and the program's capacity, and make referrals where required.

### *Referral Protocols*

17.2 SVAP workers follow established program and cross-agency protocols when making or accepting referrals.

### *Awareness of Referral Resources*

17.3 SVAP workers continuously maintain or upgrade their awareness and knowledge of the referral resources that may be helpful to clients.

### *Support for Referrals*

17.4 SVAP workers proactively support the transition of clients to other services when appropriate and timely.

## 16.0 Conflict of Interest and Avoidance of Dual Relationships

### *Dual Relationships*

17.1 SVAP workers are aware of and avoid dual familial, social, business or personal relationships which could impair their professional judgment or increase the risk to clients. If a dual relationship which could effect clients is perceived, this should be brought to the attention of the program or agency supervisor

17.2 Unavoidable overlapping relationships between workers and clients are resolved with the highest priority being the well-being of clients.

17.3 SVAP workers distinguish clearly between statements and actions made as private individuals and as representatives of a Specialized Victim Assistance Program.

***Remuneration and Financial Gain***

- 17.4 SVAP workers receive no financial remuneration, gain or benefits from clients as a result of program services provided, with the exception of token expressions of appreciation from clients or their families.
- 17.5 SVAP workers do not exploit relationships with clients for any personal gain or the gain of friends, relatives or associates.
- 17.6 SVAP workers do not use client or program information for their own advantage or to acquire material benefits.

***Supplementary Employment and Affiliations***

- 17.7 Non-SVAP paid employment (e.g. private practice or contract work) or volunteer work, undertaken by SVAP workers, must not be in conflict with the objectives of SVAP or impair service delivery to SVAP clients.
- 17.8 SVAP workers are not affiliated with organizations or associations which have objectives or carry out activities which are in conflict with the activities and objectives of the Specialized Victim Assistance Program.

**17.0 Social Change**

- 17.1 SVAP workers address destructive power imbalances, broader social issues, and abuse or oppression through client advocacy, public education, prevention, lobbying or other forms of social activism where appropriate and not in conflict with their agency's mandate and priorities.
- 17.2 SVAP workers support and advocate on behalf of victim's rights.

## Appendix I

### **A Problem-solving Model for Resolving Ethical Dilemmas or Concerns**

**Step 1:** *Determine the parties directly involved in the ethical situation.*

Clarify who should participate in the decision-making process and their rights and responsibilities.

**Step 2:** *Define the issues involved.*

What are the potential implications and outcomes of the situation?

**Step 3:** *Determine the other information that should be brought to bear on the issue.*

Are there ethics codes, guidelines, standards or precedents which might apply? (Consult with program managers, supervisors, agency director, colleagues or other agencies. Raise issues, if appropriate, at staff meetings).

**Step 4:** *Consider a range of alternative methods for resolving the issue.*

What would be the consequence of each alternative for those most likely to be affected (e.g., staff, client, client's family or employers, colleagues, other agencies)?

**Step 5:** *Determine whose responsibility it is to decide which alternative to implement.*

**Step 6:** *Determine the optimum method for resolving the dilemma and why.*

**Step 7:** *Decide on a course of action.*

**Step 8:** *Implement a course of action.*

**Step 9:** *Evaluate the outcomes and, where appropriate, incorporate the solutions into program standards, program policies or Codes of Ethics.*