

THE HORIZONS PROJECT

PUBLICATION SERIES

HP-008

Consent, Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Building trust through honesty, respect and appropriate communication.

Version 1.0

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About This Publication

Trust is rarely given all at once. It develops gradually, one conversation at a time and one promise kept after another.

People often share deeply personal experiences during Momentum Support Sessions. Sometimes they speak about hopes they have never voiced before, describe fears they have carried for years, or disclose experiences that leave them feeling vulnerable, embarrassed or uncertain about what should happen next.

The Horizons Project recognises the privilege that comes with being trusted in this way. This publication explains how informed consent, confidentiality and thoughtful information sharing help protect that trust while supporting safe, collaborative and ethical practice.

The central message is simple: trust is protected by clarity. People should not have to guess what consent means, what confidentiality includes, when confidentiality has limits or why information may sometimes be shared. They should be helped to understand these things clearly, respectfully and early enough to make informed choices.

In that sense, HP-008 stands alongside HP-007 – Safeguarding and Shared Responsibility as its ethical companion. Safeguarding explains how responsibility is shared when safety is at stake; this publication explains how trust is protected through honesty, informed choice and proportionate communication.

Trust Begins With Honesty

People deserve to know how their information will be treated before they decide whether to share it. That understanding should never be hidden within lengthy documents or discovered only when something goes wrong.

Instead, it should form part of the relationship from the very beginning. Horizons believes people should understand what confidentiality means, when it applies and the limited circumstances in which information may need to be shared without their agreement.

These conversations are not administrative formalities. They are acts of respect, and trust grows when expectations are clear.

Consent Is More Than a Signature

Consent is often associated with forms: boxes are ticked, documents are signed and permissions are recorded. Those things matter, but meaningful consent goes much further.

People should understand what they are agreeing to, feel free to ask questions and know they can change their mind where appropriate. Most importantly, they should never feel pressured into agreeing simply because someone appears to be in a position of authority.

Within Horizons, consent is understood as an ongoing conversation rather than a single event. It should remain informed, voluntary and proportionate throughout the relationship.

Consent should be revisited when circumstances change, when new information may need to be shared or when a person's preferences appear to have shifted. It is strongest when it remains alive within the relationship rather than filed away as evidence that a conversation once took place.

Horizons in Practice

Rachel has been attending Momentum Support Sessions while also working with her counsellor. During one conversation she says, "There's something I really want to tell my counsellor, but every time I get there I lose my nerve."

Together, they talk about different possibilities. Rachel decides she would like Horizons to let her counsellor know only one thing: that she hopes to discuss an important issue during the next appointment. Nothing more.

Before anything is communicated, Rachel understands exactly what will be shared, why it may be helpful and who will receive the information. She agrees, and the message is sent.

When the counselling session takes place, the conversation belongs entirely to Rachel and her counsellor. Horizons has not spoken on her behalf; it has simply supported her in opening a door she wanted to walk through herself.

What Trust Looks Like in Practice

Trust is protected through observable behaviour, not only through written commitments.

In practice, this means explaining confidentiality before sensitive conversations begin, checking understanding rather than assuming it, and asking permission before sharing information wherever possible.

It also means explaining why sharing may be necessary when consent cannot reasonably be obtained, sharing only what is relevant with only those who need to know, recording consent clearly and revisiting it as circumstances change.

These behaviours do not turn trust into procedure. They make respect visible.

Confidentiality Creates Safety

People are often willing to speak honestly because they believe their conversations will remain private. That expectation deserves respect.

Confidentiality creates the conditions in which trust can develop. Without it, many important conversations would never begin.

Yet confidentiality has never meant absolute secrecy. There are limited situations where information may need to be shared because serious harm or a clear professional responsibility is involved.

Those circumstances are exceptional. When they arise, Horizons aims to explain what is happening, why it is necessary and, wherever possible, involve the individual in that process.

The goal is not to reduce confidentiality to safeguarding alone. It is to preserve dignity, honesty and trust even when confidentiality has limits.

Sharing Information With Purpose

Not every piece of information needs to be passed on. In fact, good professional communication is often defined by what is not shared.

Horizons believes information should only be shared when there is a clear and appropriate reason. Sometimes an existing professional needs to know that someone wishes to discuss a particular concern. Sometimes safeguarding responsibilities require communication with another organisation. Sometimes the most respectful decision is to keep information entirely within the conversation.

Sharing information simply because it exists is rarely good practice. Sharing information because it helps someone receive safer, better or more coordinated support is something very different.

Purpose should always come before process. Before information is shared, Horizons should be able to explain the purpose clearly: what is being shared, why it matters, who needs to receive it and how much detail is genuinely necessary.

The Individual Remains Central

It is easy for discussions about consent and confidentiality to become focused on organisations: who may receive information, who may disclose it and which procedures apply.

Horizons deliberately begins somewhere else: with the individual. Information belongs first to the person whose life it describes.

Professional responsibilities may occasionally require decisions that override personal wishes in order to protect people from serious harm. Those moments are important, but they should remain the exception rather than the foundation of the relationship.

Most communication should happen with people, not merely about them. Wherever possible, people should participate in decisions about their information before those decisions are made, rather than being told afterwards that something has already been shared.

A Relationship Built on Choice

Momentum has never been about directing people's lives. It is about helping people feel more confident in making their own decisions, and the same principle applies here.

People should feel able to decide what they wish to share, who they would like involved and what support they feel comfortable accepting.

Choice encourages ownership, ownership encourages engagement, and engagement helps build Momentum. The ideas explored throughout this publication series are connected in that way.

Trust is not separate from Momentum. It is one of the conditions that allows Momentum to exist.

Looking Ahead

Consent, confidentiality and thoughtful information sharing explain how trust is protected in direct relationships. They remind Horizons that trust is continually earned through clarity, honesty and respectful communication.

The next publication explores how Horizons learns from its own practice so that trust is not merely protected in individual conversations, but strengthened across the organisation over time.

Learning is another expression of respect. It demonstrates that the trust people place in us is never taken for granted.

An Invitation

Every meaningful conversation begins with a choice: the choice to speak, the choice to listen and the choice to trust another person with something important.

The Horizons Project believes those choices deserve to be met with honesty, respect and careful judgement.

When people know what will happen with the information they share, they are more likely to speak openly. When they speak openly, relationships deepen, and when relationships deepen, meaningful engagement becomes more likely.

That is why consent, confidentiality and thoughtful communication are not simply administrative responsibilities. They are expressions of trust.

Continue Exploring

Continue exploring with the next publication.

HP-009 — Reflective Practice and Continuous Learning

How reflection, professional curiosity and continual learning help The Horizons Project remain a responsible and developing organisation.

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