

# Confidentiality



## DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF CONFIDENTIALITY IN SCHOOLS

Confidentiality can mean very different things to different people or groups of people. In the context of a large organisation like a school it is important for everyone to know and understand what is meant by confidentiality. To begin with, the dictionary definition of confidential is “ something which is spoken or given in confidence; private, entrusted with another's secret affairs”.

When speaking confidentially to someone the confider has the belief that the confidant will not discuss the content of the conversation with another. The confider is asking for the content of the conversation to be kept secret.

Anyone offering absolute confidentiality to someone else would be offering to keep the content of his or her conversation completely secret and discuss it with no one. Most people agree that children do not want gossip spreading about themselves...nor do parents want gossip going on about their child, themselves, or home life.

Think about the self-esteem and feelings of the child and parents. Soler and Peters (1993) outline several reasons why confidentiality is important in School for protecting the privacy of children and families: Firstly, confidentiality restrictions protect embarrassing personal information from disclosure. This information may include histories of emotional instability, marital conflicts, medical problems, physical or sexual abuse, alcoholism, drug use, limited education, or erratic employment. Secondly, confidentiality provisions also prevent the improper dissemination of information about children and families that might increase the likelihood of discrimination against them. Such information – about HIV status, mental health history,

use of illegal drugs, or charges of child abuse, can be harmful if released. Harm can occur even if records show that the information is unproven or inaccurate. Furthermore, protecting confidential information can be necessary to protect personal security, protect family security, protect job security, to avoid prejudice or differential treatment and to encourage individuals to make use of services designed to help them.

On the whole, assurance of confidentiality is very important to establishing and maintaining a strong teacher-student relationship. It is important because it enables people to seek help without fear of such results as stigma, retaliation, disapproval, or damage to other relationships. Confidentiality encourages both full disclosure, which is essential for effective treatment, and the maintenance of trust, the means by which treatment is effected.