

Non-Negotiables

Guidelines for Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence Board, Staff, Interns and Volunteers

The primary expectation of all SPAN staff, volunteers, interns and board members is a willingness to take responsibility for their own responses and reactions to any given situation and to engage in a process that is ongoing and open to learning and feedback. The following “Non-Negotiables” are intended to help clarify the philosophical goals of the agency and serve as the baseline criteria from which we assess levels of appropriateness for working within the agency. Political education and active critical thinking are necessary components of our work.

1. We share a basic understanding that
 - violence against women is systemic;
 - women are an oppressed group; and
 - oppression in any form (racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, cissexism, ageism, ableism etc.) is an act of violence.
2. We acknowledge intimate partner violence as an action taken primarily against women.
3. We do not blame the victim in any way for victimization. This includes:
 - respect for all people regardless of race, gender, religion, culture, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status or class;
 - an understanding of the use of violence that considers patterns of behavior, motive and impact, as opposed to a single act; and
 - an approach that is rooted in advocacy as defined by the client.
4. We continuously work to recognize and challenge our own personal beliefs. This requires:
 - an ongoing process of becoming aware of our own prejudices and privileges;
 - constant effort made toward avoiding projection of personal beliefs about a client’s and/or their children’s circumstances, or assuming that we know what is best for them;
 - the responsibility to be aware of our judgments and reactions when others disagree or hold different beliefs from our own.
 - a willingness to share personal ideas, and to receive feedback and challenges on these ideas;
 - the responsibility to challenge oppression and privilege in others and ourselves.
 - full accountability for our words and actions.
5. We demonstrate willingness to relinquish/share power and privilege. We are committed to seeking understanding about our experiences both as oppressor and oppressed.
6. We have a commitment to ethical communication in all of our interpersonal encounters. It is our goal to support each other in this process.
7. We value and are committed to social change through activism and community organizing.
8. We challenge and avoid the use of blaming, disrespectful, or violent language in our daily lives.
9. We strive to ensure that our actions, with clients, each other, and the community at-large are consistent with our stated beliefs.
10. We believe that the use of any form of violence to establish power and control is not acceptable.

In summary, the Non-Negotiables reflect a process that occurs on a continuum. There is no finish-line or ‘final destination’ in following these guidelines. Instead, we recognize the fluidity of learning and change. There are few role models for the implementation of these and similar philosophical goals. We are committed to participating in the process reflected in these “Non-Negotiables” to the best of our ability.

Ethical Communication: An Organizational Tool For Social Change



Ethical Communication has evolved into a practice that incorporates feminist, social activist, theological, multiracial, and recovery-program perspectives, and addresses issues of oppression and empowerment. While it is a useful means for resolving conflict, Ethical Communication is also a practice for everyday encounters. It reflects a social change paradigm, and it provides a professional standard by which to measure interactions with colleagues. It is a method that can work in a hierarchical organizational structure, provided that an abuse of power is not present. The practice of Ethical Communication maximizes opportunities for open and direct interaction within organizations, while minimizing the potential for blow-ups and damaging incidents.

ETHICAL COMMUNICATION
EQUALS
COMMUNICATION SKILLS:
Outcome Thinking – Rapport – Behavioral Flexibility – Sensory Awareness
PLUS
SOCIAL JUSTICE THEORY:
Personal and Group Accountability
Awareness of and Action on Power and Privilege

SOCIAL JUSTICE PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL COMMUNICATION

- Direct communication and resolution are primary goals
- As members of a group, we cultivate open personal agendas vs. secret agendas
- No one is isolated or denied a process when challenges arise
- We are accountable – individually and as a group – for the impact of unethical alliance building and power blocs on the group
- Conflict and precisely focused anger can be instructive experiences and at times essential to reach true resolution
- We strive to become aware of and take responsible action for power differentials (formal and informal power)
- We notice and are accountable for patterns reflecting privilege
- We remain open to examining own beliefs and perceptions without indulging in self-consciousness

Good communication skills can take a lifetime to develop: how do we articulate our views clearly, hear another's viewpoint, and engage in disagreement in a way that is respectful and direct? Additionally, while conflict is a daily occurrence and can prompt us into action, how we respond to it, our motives, and our methods for handling it is the ethical challenge. Developing facilitation skills in Ethical Communication can lead to resolution among individuals and groups. Learning to give feedback in a direct, honest, and respectful way can improve our ability to receive and incorporate feedback for self-improvement. By taking responsibility to ensure a safe (though not always comfortable!) group environment, we are more able to take personal risks in challenging each other and in sharing new ideas.

When we model ethical standards of communication in our daily lives, we challenge ourselves to weigh and reevaluate the meaning of our words. When we hold every viewpoint as valid, even if we disagree with it, we dismantle the entities that seek to silence us. **By focusing on the issue or behavior rather than the person**, we receive opportunities to expand our vision by seeing things from more than one angle. By imparting respect and empathy when confronting an opposing viewpoint, we cultivate the wisdom and patience necessary for sustaining us through social struggles. By incorporating these skills daily within our professional and personal lives, we model behavior that is at the heart of social change – healing through action. Through ethical interactions, we broaden and strengthen the web that binds us to our common humanity.

These Guidelines are part of a larger workbook and training program on Ethical Communication, developed by the staff at Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence. For presentation information or to purchase Ethical Communication materials, please contact Nancy Chavez-Porter, Training and Community Education Director, at 303-449-8623, or nancy@safehousealliance.org.

Ethical Communication Checklist

- GO INWARD and take responsibility for your own reactions and personal growth.
- MAKE a COMMITMENT to yourself, the other person and the group that you will reach resolution to the conflict. This is different than wanting to prove that you're right. You might want to discuss what "resolution" would look like for each of you.
- Go DIRECTLY to the SOURCE of your concerns. This eliminates gossip, group fragmentation and putting people in the middle of a situation that has nothing to do with them!
- Use "I" STATEMENTS, CLEAR LANGUAGE, and as many SPECIFIC EXAMPLES as possible. This might require taking some time to first determine what the key issues are.
- BE PREPARED to take the TIME to work through it. If resolution is not attained in the first meeting, then make a commitment to ongoing discussion.
- Allow yourself be CHALLENGED by new ideas! CONSTRUCTIVE criticism is ethical. Debate and disagreement can be healthy. It might not always feel *comfortable*, but as long as it's done in the spirit of respect, it's an opportunity for you to GROW! (...and it can be done gently, too!)
- Keep the GOAL of Ethical Communication in mind: resolvable conflict and unity. Reaching resolution creates power and cohesion in a group committed to social change!
- PRACTICE! PRACTICE! PRACTICE!



Five phrases to live by:
Thank You. I Love You. How Are You? What Do You Need? I'm Sorry.

Guidelines for Ethical Communication



Look at your own “agenda” within the group or interaction.

AGENDA: The goal or purpose you seek to accomplish.

Personal agendas are valid when they are shared with the group. This promotes group cohesiveness and decisions based on everyone’s input.

Secret agendas - withholding information and your opinions from the group - are dishonest.

Consider the consequences of being unethical.

Silencing can be direct (put downs, verbal attacks, threats, using innuendo) or indirect (teasing, minimizing, interrupting, non-verbal communication). The effects of silencing and other destructive actions can lead to **oppression** - action or words, intended or unintended, which result in power-over another, causing distress, suppression, alienation, and/or disempowerment. If one person in the group feels oppressed, the whole group is denied the power of their input.

Be honest about your own individual responsibility.

It is up to you to take responsibility for your reactions and to be personally accountable for your words, actions and judgments. The goal of Ethical Communication is not to dump your problems and vent your anger, though anger can be a positive emotion. The goal is to create a positive, well-functioning environment built on strong relationships and an openness to different perspectives. You might find that one situation stirs up old issues that can be more directly dealt with elsewhere. Examine self-imposed silences. Be clear about what triggers you!

Acknowledge the various levels of power, and that the group itself carries responsibility.

When working within a group committed to ethical communication, it is everyone’s responsibility to create an environment conducive to participation. Everyone in the group must be treated with respect. No one should fear that their opinions be judged or gossiped about if shared. Every view is important **and** it is healthy to pose direct challenges to each other in an effort to address unexamined privilege.

Conflict is inevitable and all around us.

We have choices around how we communicate and how we seek resolution to conflict. If our pattern is to avoid addressing conflict directly, we can contribute to an unethical environment. The process may involve courage, as we assess the risks involved in voicing our concerns (including the differentials in power and privilege). The goal is to address conflict directly, with personal accountability (i.e. no ‘dumping’).

Precisely-focused anger can be informative and useful.

Anger can give you some information about what the real problem is. It can also be used as a survival skill if you have been consistently disempowered by a power-and-control, racist, sexist, heterosexist society. Remember that anger can have a constructive focus as well as a destructive one. It takes some time to clarify, but the end result is often worth it.

Be part of the solution.

Facilitators are trained individuals who provide clarity and direction. Their focus is process and resolution. **Agitators** are unethical communicators who feed into the conflict with their negativity and avoid resolution. They create cliques which result in group fragmentation.

We’ve all been both...choose to be a Facilitator!

Be pro-active.

Process-oriented people are committed to resolution, pay attention to timing, and are direct in all their dealings. **Problem-oriented** people may misuse anger, exaggerate, retaliate, get impatient and want an all-or-nothing outcome (e.g. either everyone is happy or we should just drop it).