

## **Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence (SPAN) Code of Ethics**

### **SPAN Staff and Volunteers – “Non-Negotiables” and Ethical Communication**

#### **Includes:**

- *Non-Negotiables: Guidelines for SPAN Board, Staff, Interns and Volunteers*  
Describes the Principles, Values and Ethics that guide our work
- *Ethical Communication: An Organizational Tool For Social Change*  
Describes the Expectations for Positive Conflict Resolution and Communication among staff, volunteers, clients and community partners.
- *SPAN Employee Handbook – Ethical Standards*  
Describes the organization’s expectations of employees adherence to ethical standards and practices.

All candidates for SPAN staff positions are provided the “Non-Negotiables” and “Ethical Communication” documents for review prior to their interview and are informed that, as a staff member, they would be expected to adhere to the principles (“Code of Ethics”) outlined in these documents. Questions about the Non-Negotiables and Ethical Communication are included in the interview process.

All potential SPAN volunteers are also provided these documents during their interview with the Volunteer Coordinator, prior to Volunteer Training. Volunteers are informed that they are also expected to adhere to the principles and ethics outlined in the documents.

Once hired, all staff receives and signs the SPAN Employee Handbook, which includes a section on Ethical Standards. An employee’s failure to adhere to Ethical Standards is reason for disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

### **Client Rights and Expectations**

#### **Includes:**

- *Legal Advocacy Client Rights Disclosure*  
Describes Rights & Expectations for Legal Advocacy Clients; given to clients during first session with the Legal Advocate.
- *Counseling Disclosure Form*  
Describes Counseling Program Client’s Rights, Grievance Procedures, Boundaries, Confidentiality (and Exceptions), and Qualifications of Counselor/Advocate; given to clients at intake.

Each SPAN Program provides clients with a “Rights/Disclosure” document (Spanish/ English, and translated to other languages as needed) that describes their rights as a SPAN client and what they can expect from the SPAN Advocate/Counselor. This document operationalizes the Code of Ethics, informing clients of the organization’s commitment to ethics/standards of services and providing information about what they can do if they feel their Counselor/Advocate is not adhering to these standards.

## **Non–Negotiables**

### **Guidelines for Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence (SPAN) 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.

1. We share a basic understanding that
  - o violence against women is systemic;
  - o women are an oppressed group; and
  - o oppression in any form (racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, ageism etc.) is an act of violence.
  
2. We acknowledge battering as an action taken primarily against women.
  
3. We do not blame the victim in any way for her victimization. This includes:
  - o respect for all women regardless of race, religion, culture, age, sexual orientation or class;
  - o an understanding of the use of violence that considers patterns of behavior, motive and impact, as opposed to a single act; and
  - o an approach that is rooted in advocacy as defined by the woman.
  
4. We continuously work to recognize and challenge our own personal beliefs. This requires
  - o an ongoing process of becoming aware of our own prejudices and privileges;
  - o constant effort made toward avoiding projection of personal beliefs about a woman’s and/or her children’s circumstances, or assuming that we know what is best for her;
  - o the responsibility to be aware of our judgments when others disagree or hold different beliefs from our own.
  - o a willingness to share personal ideas, and to receive feedback and challenges on these ideas;
  - o the responsibility to challenge oppression and privilege in others and ourselves.
  - o 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.



## 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.

### ***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 her 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 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).

## **SPAN Employee Handbook**

### **Ethical Standards**

All persons who work or volunteer at SPAN shall be aware that they, as individuals, as well as SPAN as a whole, carry significant social responsibility. As recommendations made by individuals representing SPAN may alter the lives of others, those representatives should be especially alert to personal, social, organizational and other pressures that might lead to misuse of this influence or to conflicts of interest.

All employees are expected to adhere to the professional and ethical standards set forth by their respective disciplines. The following areas are emphasized but are not all-inclusive:

#### **1. Confidential Information**

All information regarding SPAN clients and the location of the shelter is confidential. Staff, relief staff, volunteers and interns, as well as former employees, volunteers, and interns, must comply with all legally imposed confidentiality statuses. A signed release of information form must be completed prior to the release of any client information. The release of information form must specify what information is to be released and the name of the person and/or agency to which information is to be given. Unauthorized release of confidential information can result in disciplinary action including dismissal.

All information discussed at SPAN will be considered confidential information. This includes, but is not limited to, information obtained in staff meetings, case review, supervision and board meetings.

Reporting of child abuse and/or neglect as required by the Colorado Children's Code is mandatory. Failure to report child abuse and/or neglect can result in disciplinary action including dismissal.

#### **2. Client Relationships**

SPAN employees are not to enter into sexual or social relationships with SPAN clients, their immediate family members, or with perpetrators. Any employee engaging in such activities with clients, their immediate family members, or perpetrators will be subject to disciplinary action that can include dismissal. This policy extends for 24 months from the date of last client service(s).

#### **3. Respect for Varying Opinions and Practices**

SPAN respects the varying opinions and practices of its paid and volunteer staff, but does not permit the advocacy of individual religious, political or lifestyle preferences or one's personal business concerns within any SPAN program.

#### **4. Conflict of Interest**

Individuals associated with SPAN should be aware of potential conflicts of interest with the goals and objectives of SPAN and its consumers.

5. Private Practice, Private Business, and Conflicts of Interest

- a. A SPAN employee, engaged in a private practice or business which offers a same or similar service as that provided by SPAN, shall not serve, on a private basis, any clients who have received any counseling, shelter, crisis intervention or advocacy-related service from SPAN within the 12 months prior to the first private practice contact or business contact.
- b. A SPAN employee shall not use SPAN facilities or materials or her position as an employee of SPAN to further her private practice or business, nor shall said employee engage in any activity related to her private practice or business while being paid by SPAN as its employee.
- c. In the event there is a conflict between the employee's work schedule at SPAN and activities related to the employee's practice or business, the employee's responsibility to SPAN shall have priority.
- d. SPAN employees shall not identify themselves as SPAN employees in their private practice or business advertising (e.g., telephone listings, business cards, seminar materials, etc.). Exceptions shall have prior approval of the Executive Director.
- e. The Executive Director shall have the discretion to make exceptions to subparagraphs b, c and d above, based on clinical and ethical considerations.
- f. A SPAN employee violating this policy shall face disciplinary actions up to and including discharge.

# ***Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence (SPAN) Legal Advocacy Program***

## **What You Can Expect as a SPAN Legal Advocacy Client:**

### ***Respect:***

- *You can expect to be listened to and respected by SPAN Advocates.*
- *You can expect SPAN Advocates to be ethical and professional in their work with you.*

### ***Information and Advocacy:***

- *You can expect to be given information about legal resources in Boulder and Broomfield Counties, as well as resources we may know about in other communities that might be helpful to you.*
- *SPAN does not provide legal representation or give legal advice, but we will do our best to connect you with pro bono or low fee attorneys or other legal resources that are affordable and meet your needs.*
- *You can reach the SPAN Legal Advocacy Program staff by calling the Outreach Center at 303-449-8623. SPAN Advocates are not allowed to give out their personal cell phone numbers. The SPAN 24-hour crisis/information line is 303-444-2424.*
- *Your meetings with SPAN Advocates will typically be at the SPAN offices or other justice system locations, like the courthouse.*

### ***Confidentiality:***

- *All information you share with SPAN is confidential and will never be shared with anyone outside of the agency unless you give us written permission to do so.*
- *HOWEVER, there are some exceptions to this. SPAN Advocates are required by law to break confidentiality under the following circumstances:*
  - *If you tell us about known or suspected child abuse and/or neglect, or abuse of an at-risk adult;*
  - *If you tell us about your intention to harm yourself or others;*
  - *If a court orders us to or if there is a lawsuit against us that requires us to.*

### ***Policy About Money and Other Important Information:***

- *You will **NEVER** be asked to give SPAN Advocates money toward your legal services (this includes fees for court costs, payments to attorneys, application processing fees, or other exchange of money).*
- *If you choose to work with an attorney that SPAN has referred you to through the SPAN Legal Advocacy Program, any fee or payment arrangements should be directly made between you and your attorney.*
- *If personal documents (like birth certificates, Social Security cards, other immigration-related documents) are needed for your case, you should only provide copies of these to SPAN and keep the originals with you (a staff member can help you make copies at our Outreach Center).*

### ***Questions or Complaints:***

- *If you ever have questions about the assistance provided to you or are dissatisfied with the Advocate working with you, please contact Executive Director, Anne Tapp, at 303-449-8623. We want to do everything possible to provide you quality services that meet your unique needs.*

# **SAFEHOUSE PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE FOR NONVIOLENCE (SPAN)**

## **Counseling Disclosure Form**

### **CLIENT RIGHTS:**

1. **Grievances:** If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the counseling services received through Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence (SPAN), you are encouraged to speak directly with a supervisor at the agency. Supervisors can be contacted by calling the administrative office or the crisis line.

Additionally, in Colorado, the practice of victim's advocate is regulated by the Department of Regulatory Agencies. As a result, you have the right to contact the Grievance Board of the Department of Regulatory Agencies with your concerns or complaint about the counseling received through SPAN. Their address and phone number is:

Grievance Board  
Department of Regulatory Agencies, Mental Health Section  
1560 Broadway, Suite 1370; Denver, CO 80202  
Tel: 303-894-7766

2. **Methods of Treatment:** As client of SPAN, you are entitled to receive information about the methods of counseling techniques used, the duration of counseling (if known), and the fee structure. Furthermore, you may seek a second opinion from another counselor and may terminate counseling at any time.
3. **Sexual Intimacy:** You should know that in a professional counseling relationship sexual intimacy is never appropriate and should be reported to the Grievance Board under the Department of Regulatory Agencies.
4. **Confidentiality:** As an organization, we are bound to protect the confidentiality of the information shared during your counseling sessions and will not share any confidential information with outside parties without your expressed prior written consent.
5. **Exclusions to Confidentiality:** By law and agency policy, SPAN keeps all information provided by you during your contact with us confidential. However, we are required by the law to break confidentiality under the following circumstances:
  - a) known or suspected child abuse and/or neglect, or abuse of an at-risk adult;
  - b) intended harm to self or others;
  - c) court ordered or in the case of a lawsuit against ourselves;
  - d) instances of serious expected acts of violence- duty to warn legal agencies and intended victims;
6. **Qualifications:** You are entitled to information concerning any counselor/victim's advocate in the employ of this agency who is providing services to you. Such information includes the name, educational degrees, licenses and credentials as noted on the reverse of this form.

**I have read and acknowledge my understanding of my rights as a SPAN client and the exclusions to the limits of confidentiality.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Client signature (parent/guardian for minor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Counselor signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date