Canterbury Nightline

Volunteer welfare POLICY

# Volunteer Welfare

Volunteering for Nightline involves interacting with vulnerable people and listening to distressing material. Supporting volunteers is a moral duty of any helpline and is vital to protecting volunteer welfare. Volunteers are not able to handle callers effectively unless they feel emotionally resilient. In order for Nightline to function properly, it is essential that all volunteers are properly supervised and supported.

**Support** can be defined as the process of *debriefing* which takes place immediately after calls or shifts and ensures that volunteers are always aware of who they can contact when they need to.

**Supervision** can be defined as the ongoing process of *monitoring* the service and checking the continued impact of calls on volunteers.

Nightline volunteers may be exposed to deeply distressing material and, whilst volunteers are trained not to become emotionally involved with calls, they may be affected on some level by what they hear on the phone.

## Senior volunteers

* Senior volunteers play a key part in the running of the service particularly in regard to volunteer welfare
* Senior volunteers will be individuals with prior experience in working as a skilled helper e.g. mentoring or support work
* After the first year, senior volunteers will be individuals who have a years’ experience working for Canterbury Nightline
* All senior volunteers can complete extra CPD training to better prepare for the role.
* Each senior volunteer will oversee no more than 5 volunteers
* Senior volunteers will be overseen by the Admin Coordinator
* The Coordinators can act as a senior volunteer if needed. Following training in October 2021, senior volunteers will be appointed from existing listening volunteers who have attended all compulsory training sessions and have completed a minimum of 6 shifts.

## Support during training

* Trainees will be warned prior to, and on the day, that the training covers many difficult issues, which will affect them all differently
* Trainees will be informed that they can leave the training room at any point if they need a break
* The Coordinators / trainers and Samaritans will keep an eye on how trainees are reacting to the training sessions and take trainees aside if they appear distressed
* There will be breaks between sessions for trainees to reflect on the content and have a break - trainers will be available during this time to provide support if necessary

## Support while on shift

* For a shift to run, there has to be at least two (and up to three) volunteers present in the designated Nightline room
* At least one volunteer must be free (i.e. not taking a call) at all times so that if a problem arises, they are free to help/provide support to the other volunteer
* Volunteers are encouraged to ‘talk through’ a call once it has finished with the other volunteers they are on shift with (but not forced to if they do not want to as this can be detrimental)
* Volunteers are encouraged to make use of the ‘check in’ and ‘check out’ (see Shift Plan for more information) time during every shift
* If a volunteer is struggling and needs a break, they can ask the other volunteer present to take the next call
* If a volunteer needs a debrief, the phones can be switched to answer-phone while this happens
* If a volunteer feels unable to continue their shift for any reason, the standby volunteer can be called in or the shift can be closed if opening would provide more harm to volunteers and callers
* If additional support or advice is required at any time, the on-call senior volunteer can be called
* If the on-call senior requires additional support or advice the Coordinator can be called
* At the end of the shift each volunteer should reflect on their shift and the senior volunteer can be called to talk through these reflections with each volunteer.

## Support after shifts

It is quite common for volunteers to find that difficult calls have an ongoing effect on them. It may be that a volunteer did not find a call upsetting at the time, but later finds that they are unable to get it out of their head. Sometimes calls can resonate with issues in a volunteer’s own life and they may find it difficult to separate their own emotions from the effects of the call. Many volunteers have different ‘trigger’ issues, which they may not always be aware of, and it is important that volunteers try and identify their own trigger issues during training so that they can seek support where necessary.

* When the phone lines close at 8am after every shift, the on-call senior should contact both volunteers before they leave the Nightline room to check how they are feeling and see if there are any calls they wish to discuss.
* All volunteers can call the on-call senior volunteer at any time for support regardless if they are on shift or not. Contact details for on-call seniors are accessible via 3Rings.

## Supervision

* At each team meeting, half an hour should be put aside for group supervision during which volunteers will split into their small groups/support bubbles and receive peer support led by their individual senior volunteers.
* During this time, each volunteer will be encouraged to discuss at least one call to reduce barriers such as shyness.
* In addition to this, each volunteer should have at least three 1-1 supervision sessions with their senior volunteer.
* From launch, all listening volunteers can have access to a 1-1 supervision session led by a Samaritans representative if desired.
* Volunteers can email/call either their senior volunteer or the Coordinator at any time to arrange additional supervision if they wish
* After each team meeting, all senior volunteers should review the sessions with the coordinators.
* Senior volunteers should receive 1-1 supervision 3 times a year with the Coordinator/s.

## University Support

### All volunteers

If any volunteer feels they need further support or counselling, they have access to their University’s support services: Student Support and Wellbeing at The University of Kent or Student Support and Wellbeing at Canterbury Christ Church University.

* An additional training session, delivered by the Training and Admin Coordinators (with input from external professionals) will be delivered to senior volunteers to develop their skills, knowledge and strategies for supporting other volunteers.

### Canterbury Christ Church University Volunteers

The Chaplaincy at Canterbury Christ Church University offers a confidential listening service. This is non-religious and available regardless of your beliefs. Any Christ Church volunteer can approach the Chaplaincy for support.

Canterbury Christ Church volunteers also have access to drop-in sessions run by Student Support and Wellbeing Advisers as well as drop-in sessions run by the Mental Wellbeing Team at Canterbury Christ Church University.

### University of Kent volunteers

Kent volunteers have access to the crisis drop-in support run by Student Support and Wellbeing at The University of Kent.

## External Support

### Samaritans

There are a number of confidential helplines available in the UK. The most well-known of these is Samaritans who can be contacted at any time, for free, on 116 123 or emailed on jo@samaritans.org.

Samaritans offer a very similar service to Nightline, and can be contacted at any time, for any reason. Volunteers may discuss the content of calls with Samaritans. However, you must never mention any details that could be used to identify a caller.

A Samaritans volunteer can be invited to the listening volunteer team meetings and are available to offer 1-1 debrief sessions for any volunteer who feels they need or would like additional support.

### Other support

**The 24/7 Mental Health Matters Helpline**: 0800 107 0160, offers confidential emotional support and guidance. They also have details of local and national support services.

**Big White Wall**: [www.bigwhitewall.com](http://www.bigwhitewall.com), offer 24/7 online, anonymous support for issues around mental health and wellbeing free to both Canterbury Christ Church University and University of Kent students. Information on how to register to Big White Wall can be found on the webpages of both Universities Student Support and Wellbeing websites.

### Support between nightline and other services

There are many reasons why a volunteer may not want to discuss a problem with a volunteer from their own Nightline. Sometimes a call can affect a volunteer because it evokes personal experiences. It may be difficult for a volunteer to raise these issues with people they see regularly. Some volunteers can also be unwilling to admit that a call affected them, and unwilling to ‘ask for help’. Also, the support system is planned around listening volunteers, and thus the support committee may not feel it is appropriate to use this system.

Therefore, a support arrangement with Bath Nightline has been arranged so that volunteers can use the service without worrying about being recognised by the person they speak to. Content of calls, or difficulties with other volunteers may be discussed however this must be done anonymously.

## Other Information

* It is understood that volunteers undergoing challenging life events or health difficulties may find this affects their ability to volunteer for nightline
* In such instances volunteers will be encouraged to discuss options with their Nightline coordinator (or paid staff member if they prefer) such as taking time out, reducing shift hours or switching from a listening role to a non-listening role until they feel better able to respond to callers