

IFOTES ETHICAL CHARTER

I. Preamble

It is a well-known fact that the individual often suffers from isolation in spite of the unavoidable promiscuity which characterizes everyday life. The magnitude and pace of changes within society is a threat to his personality and brings about physical, psychological and spiritual discomfort.

Despite the constant technological advances achieved in the sphere of communications, such progress has not led to any improvement of significance in the field of interpersonal contacts.

Consequently, the relationship between individuals is often so low that it becomes very difficult, in many instances, to find someone to talk to and with whom a genuine exchange of views can be established.

In order to be able to speak, one must have an attentive listener and to find such a willing ear is, by no means, obvious.

In such a context and in a genuine spirit of solidarity and social creativity, Telephone Emergency Services were set up as Non Governmental Organisations. They offer a pinpoint response, which is immediately accessible to anyone suffering from loneliness, anguish or despair, particularly those who entertain the possibility of committing suicide.

They strive, essentially, to help the individual to clarify his present situation and take stock of his potential resources which will enable him to start afresh. They were set up and work on the basis of the human values outlined in the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. They stress, in particular:

- the dignity of every human being. (art 1)
- his right to be respected in his thoughts, wishes and everyday life; (art18)
- the right to express himself in the language familiar to him (art.19).

II. Ethical Charter A. Institution

1. IFOTES brings together, at an international level, national associations who aim at ensuring, night and day, an organised telephone emergency service readily accessible to any distressed individual wishing desperately to express his thoughts.

2. Such services offer the caller an opportunity for genuine exchange.
3. They constitute a recourse for all those who are lonely or desperate or are likely to hesitate in sharing their problems or opinions either with people who know them or who may be in a position to identify them.
4. They are available to all, whatever their problems, but especially to those who go through a crisis and, in particular, to those who may be tempted to resort to suicide.
5. They treat all such conversations as confidential.
6. The listening services are free of charge.

B. Listening*

1. The telephone has been selected as a means of action for immediate response to urgent situations whilst ensuring that both caller and listener remain anonymous.
2. The caller can speak to the listener in entire confidentiality. He is welcomed as a "full-fledged citizen and as such he is certain that he will be treated with all due respect
3. He expresses himself according to his ability and, as far as possible, in his own vernacular.
4. Listening, carried out with utmost attention and without any preconceived ideas, aims at giving the caller an opportunity for a better perspective of what he is going through, a clearer view of the situation, as well as aiming to alleviate his anguish, thereby fostering self 'confidence leading to his taking new initiatives.
5. If need be, ad hoc information for obtaining external aid will be extended to the caller.

C. Listeners

1. Listening service is generally provided by volunteers who are carefully selected, trained and monitored by suitably qualified and experienced individuals
2. In addition to expressions of solidarity that listeners wish to convey to people in difficulty they learn to receive calls in a mutually constructive manner.
3. Listeners offer support without judging, influencing callers, especially by imposing their ideological, religious or political convictions.

4. Listeners are authorized to receive callers only after completing introductory training carried out by individuals qualified for this task.
5. For the duration of their collaboration, listeners regularly attend continuing training sessions, made available to them. They undertake to follow the training assiduously. It is an opportunity for them to become aware of the attitudes adopted by them on the telephone. They are assisted to evaluate their attitude in the light of exchanges and personal reflections while guided by qualified instructors.
6. They are also presented with the opportunity to confront their own listening and that of others to question themselves in order to improve the quality of their listening.
7. During calls they are particularly concerned with making themselves respected by their interlocutors. They refuse to be manipulated, abused or harassed by callers.
8. Listeners are able to rely on their colleagues, particularly those responsible for the service, for genuine support helping them to deal with the demands.
9. Listeners benefit from their activities through personal growth, further enhanced by assisting congresses, conferences, seminars and workshops organized for their benefit or supported by their association

D. Service

In practice, such listening and specific welcoming should take place within the framework of a team made up of members with diverse and varied socio-cultural backgrounds. The following criteria are taken into consideration for their selection: capacity for listening and for personal change and open-mindedness.

E. Society

The spoken word is beneficial to whoever can make use of it when he is privileged enough to find a willing ear. The Telephone Emergency Services have experience in this particular context and, consequently, strive to promote, in all sectors of society, an attitude of mutual listening.

III. Working Procedures A. Branches

1. A local team is termed a Branch

2. The statutes of the Branch - and other internal documents - define its legal framework and rules or procedure.
3. At all levels of organisation, the members (voluntary, trainers or directors) work as a team, in a spirit of service within which each one is responsible for the tasks entrusted to him/her and which he/she has accepted to perform.
4. Branches liaise with their regional organisms and social institutions.
5. They take all appropriate means to ensure that their presence is made known to all concerned.
6. They prepare an annual evaluation report of their activities

B. National Federations

1. Just as listeners rely on each other, the Telephone Emergency Services in any one region should be able to count on one another.
2. With this in view, they have established Federations so as to:
 - (a) ensure that the quality of the services offered by telephone is in conformity with the listening concept as laid out in the Charter;
 - (b) promote exchanges between branches so that the activities of those associations bearing the same name may come into line and thus avoid any possible confusion in the minds of the general public;
 - (c) co-ordinate their relationship with Public Authorities in the interest of all concerned;
 - (d) enhance the good name of the institution;
 - (e) enlighten the State, without unduly disclosing secrecy, on the prevalent social conditions, as they come to light through the telephone conversations of those callers who express their dismal living conditions

C. IFOTES International Federation

IFOTES brings together the various national Federations and Associations with a view to facilitating reasoning as well as cultural exchanges, in a spirit which is both open and respectful of differences.

Aims

1. Develop awareness of the fact that the Branches constitute an important means of breaking up the isolation of individuals, thus contributing towards alleviating their difficulties and suffering. In this connection, they are partners in the promotion of Mental Health and Prevention of Suicide.
2. Stimulate and encourage national Federations and Associations.
3. Promote and assist in the establishment and development of Telephone Emergency Services in countries where they either do not exist or have just been set up.

Means

1. Organise international meetings, such as seminars, conferences or congresses, with a view to improving the implementation of the objectives of the Telephone Emergency Services.
2. Publish (in the form of bulletins, brochures, books) information liable to be of use to the Branches.
3. Collect and disseminate data gathered by the Branches in connection with the challenges facing Mental Health and Prevention of Suicide.
4. Assist and encourage research carried out in these fields.
5. Maintain contacts with other organisations sharing the same concerns especially the World Health Organisation (W.H.O.), the World Federation for Mental Health (W.F.M.H.), the International Association for the Prevention of Suicide (I.A.P.S.), Life Line International and Befrienders International.

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