

# General Guidelines for Counselors

1. **At all times, we seek to benefit our clients and strive to avoid things that would harm them.** To do this effectively, note these simple pointers:
  - a. Avoid trying to address areas that you are not knowledgeable in. You can always refer your client to somebody else for more serious matters or simply tell them that you will revert later after having obtained some clarity on the matter they are raising.
  - b. Avoid those things that could harm the client. In unusual circumstances where there is the potential for harm (Such as when you must break confidentiality to protect someone), do everything possible to minimize the harm.
  - c. Guard yourself from a messiah complex - in and of ourselves, we are unable to help anyone. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit and the application of the Word of God, we point people to Christ and Christ-likeness.
2. **Build and maintain trust.** Often this is as simple as introducing yourself and sharing a little of your own experience and background so your client feels comfortable opening themselves up to you. Remember that they are sharing some of their innermost concerns with you. Be careful to avoid premature conclusions (listen to the whole story), ensure that your expression or words don't come across as being judgmental. Prayerfully demonstrate Christ-like grace to bring them to a place of freedom.
  - a. Humility - Sin is a very real presence in our world (Rom. 3:23) and you are directly dealing with the result. As such, you are called to remain vigilant of your own life and to counsel with humility.
3. **Integrity is crucial.**
  - a. Be honest and consistent in all things. This will also serve to help with building and maintaining trust. Speak biblical truth with grace and love (Eph. 4:15). Treat all people fairly with no prejudice or bias. Be particularly sensitive to protecting the more vulnerable amongst us.
  - b. Under no circumstances is it acceptable for a male to counsel a female alone (and vice versa) and in private.
  - c. Wherever feasible, in a formal / planned counseling session have someone else with you (we encourage husband / wife partnerships in this).
4. **Respect people's rights and dignity.**
  - a. This principle relates particularly to the area of privacy and confidentiality. Let your client know that they are in a safe environment. The exceptions to confidentiality have already been clearly outlined and agreed upon - your responsibility is to stay within these boundaries.
  - b. Let your client know that you will be taking notes during the meeting. Help them to understand that these notes are always completely confidential and remain locked away.
5. **Christian love** - Love is the bedrock of the New Testament ethic (1Cor. 13). We are to love others with the love that God has bestowed upon us (2Cor 1:3-7) and that is rooted in Christ's sacrifice for us. Jesus is our model of love in action. In the context of counselling, it means that we are called to express a Christlike love toward those with whom we work.
6. **Accountability** - Without breaking confidentiality, please keep the elders posted on the progress of anyone assigned to you for counselling.
  - a. Where there is sin and unrepentance, the elders must be informed.
  - b. Where you require biblical perspective or additional resources, please reach out to any of the elders.