



Code of Conduct & Ethics Policy

Article I – Scope of Policy

This policy applies to: the Chief Executive Officer, members of the Board, staff and contractors, and volunteers.

Article II – Purpose

NEXTSTEP: Unlocked Potential (the “Corporation”, “NEXTSTEP”) is committed to providing safe, trauma-informed, survivor-centered services to women, children, and men affected by domestic violence. This Code of Conduct and Ethics Policy establishes the standards of professional behavior, ethical decision-making, and accountability expected of all Board members, the CEO, employees, volunteers, interns, contractors, and affiliated representatives.

Our work is grounded in dignity, safety, respect, equity, and empowerment.

Article III – Core Values

Safety First – We prioritize the safety, autonomy, confidentiality, and self-determination of survivors.

Dignity & Choice – We do not coerce and there are no “requirements” to receive help.

Survivor-Centered – Survivors define what support looks like. We serve individuals of all genders, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, religions, abilities, and socioeconomic statuses without discrimination.

Collaboration – We do not replace licensed providers; we partner with them.

Integrity & Accountability – We act honestly, transparently, and responsibly in all organizational and professional activities.

Professional Excellence – We maintain high standards of competence and continuous learning.

Article IV – Standards of Professional Conduct

Section 1. Respect and Dignity

- Treat survivors, colleagues, and community partners with respect and professionalism;
- Avoid language or behavior that is discriminatory, harassing, stigmatizing, or judgmental;
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries at all times.

Section 2. Confidentiality

- Safeguard all personally identifiable information in accordance with applicable laws (including but not limited to VAWA confidentiality provisions, HIPAA where applicable, and state privacy laws);
- Share information strictly on a need-to-know basis and only with proper consent or legal authorization;
- Never disclose survivor identities, case details, or shelter locations without explicit authorization.

Section 3. Conflict of Interest

- Disclose any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest;
- Refrain from participating in decisions where personal interests could impair objectivity;
- Avoid dual relationships that may compromise professional judgment or survivor safety.

Section 4. Professional Boundaries

- Do not engage in romantic, sexual, financial, or exploitative relationships with current clients;
- Avoid giving or receiving significant gifts that may influence professional judgment;
- Refrain from using one's position for personal gain.

Section 5. Non-Discrimination and Equal Treatment

NEXTSTEP does not tolerate discrimination or harassment based on protected characteristics under federal, state, or local law. All survivors are entitled to equitable access to services.

Section 6. Mandatory Reporting and Duty to Warn

- Comply with state-mandated reporting laws concerning child abuse, elder abuse, or imminent threats of harm;
- Inform survivors of the limits of confidentiality at the start of service delivery.

Section 7. Ethical Use of Organizational Resources

- Use funds, donations, property, and technology responsibly and solely for authorized organizational purposes;
 - Maintain accurate documentation and financial integrity.
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Article V – Workplace Conduct

The Corporation maintains a professional environment that is:

- Free from harassment, bullying, retaliation, and violence;
- Supportive of collaboration and mutual respect;
- Committed to staff wellness and vicarious trauma awareness.

Substance abuse, threatening behavior, or misuse of organizational property is strictly prohibited.

Article VI – Cultural Humility & Responsiveness

All representatives of NEXTSTEP must:

- Respect cultural, religious, and individual differences;
- Avoid imposing personal beliefs on survivors.

It is requested of all representatives of NEXTSTEP to engage in ongoing self-imposed training related to domestic violence dynamics, cultural responsiveness, implicit bias, and trauma-informed care; there is no minimum or maximum time requirement.

Article VII – Social Media & Public Communications

All representatives of NEXTSTEP must:

- Protect survivor confidentiality in all public forums;
 - Avoid posting identifiable information, images, or case details;
 - Ensure that public statements reflect organizational values and do not misrepresent the organization.
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Article VIII – Reporting Ethical Concerns

Any individual who becomes aware of potential misconduct, ethical violations, abuse of power, fraud, or safety concerns must report it promptly to:

- Chief Executive Officer; or
- Board President (if the concern involves executive leadership); or
- Designated Compliance Officer.

The organization strictly prohibits retaliation against anyone who, in good faith, reports a concern.

Article IX – Investigating & Accountability

All reports will be reviewed promptly and handled confidentially to the extent possible. Violations of this policy may result in corrective action up to and including termination of employment, volunteer dismissal, Board removal, or legal referral.

Article X – Acknowledgement

All Board members, employees, volunteers, interns, and contractors must sign an acknowledgment affirming that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Code of Conduct and Ethics Policy.

Article XI – Policy Violations

Violations of this policy may result in:

- Disciplinary action (up to and including termination of and/or removal of employment, Board position, volunteer status, etc.);
 - Legal consequences if applicable laws are breached.
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Article XII – Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the Board and updated as necessary to reflect:

- Changes in law;
 - Best practices in victim advocacy.
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This policy was reviewed and approved by the NEXTSTEP: Unlocked Potential Board of Directors.

Date Approved: 4 Apr 2026

