**General Guidelines for Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard Helpline Volunteers on Calls Involving Discussions of a Sexual Nature**

At Switchboard we provide a non-judgemental listening service which welcomes callers to have conversations about their sexuality and sex where relevant. We do not, however, expect volunteers to handle calls that are offensive or overtly sexually explicit. As a volunteer, if you feel uncomfortable during a conversation, you are not obligated to continue the call.

Here are some general guidelines to consider when dealing with discussions of a sexual nature:

1. **Maintain Confidentiality:**
   * Emphasize the importance of confidentiality with callers. Assure them that their information will not be shared without their consent, except in cases where there is a risk of harm to themselves or others.
2. **Non-Judgmental Attitude:**
   * Adopt a non-judgmental and supportive approach towards all callers, regardless of the nature of the discussion. Respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and relationship dynamics.
3. **Active Listening:**
   * Practice active listening to understand the caller's concerns and needs. Allow them to express themselves fully and without interruption.
4. **Respect Caller Autonomy:**
   * Respect the caller's autonomy in making decisions about their sexual health, relationships, and personal life. Offer information and support without imposing personal beliefs or values.
5. **Provide Accurate Information:**
   * Ensure that information provided about sexual health, relationships, and relevant services is accurate, up-to-date, and non-biased. Use trusted resources.
6. **Boundaries and Self-Care:**
   * Maintain professional boundaries during discussions of a sexual nature. If uncomfortable or unsure about how to respond to a caller's inquiry, seek guidance from a supervisor or experienced volunteer.
7. **Handle Sensitive Topics Sensitively:**
   * Approach sensitive topics (e.g., sexual trauma, abuse) with sensitivity and empathy. Provide appropriate support and refer to specialised services if needed.
8. **Safety and Risk Assessment:**
   * Offer harm reduction strategies when discussing potentially risky behaviours or situations and encourage callers to prioritise their safety.
9. **Documentation and Reporting:**
   * Accurately document calls, noting relevant details such as date, time, topics discussed, and any actions taken. Report any concerns or disclosures to the on-call support staff who will notify the Helpline manager.
10. **Continuous Learning and Support:**
    * Participate in ongoing training and supervision to enhance skills in handling calls involving discussions of a sexual nature. Seek support from colleagues and supervisors for debriefing and emotional support as needed.
11. **Self-Reflection:**
    * Reflect on personal biases and reactions to discussions of sexual topics. Practice self-awareness to ensure impartial and supportive interactions with callers.

# What happens if the caller is overtly sexual for no relevant reason, and clearly not seeking any support?

Brighton and Hove Switchboard is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for volunteers who work with us. In turn our volunteers are committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for all callers.

We do not expect volunteers to tolerate inappropriate or overtly sexualised conversations. We prioritise respectful interactions that align with our helpline's goal to provide non-judgemental and non-prescriptive support.

Suppose a caller engages in behaviour that crosses these boundaries. In that case, our volunteers are empowered to assertively address the issue and, if necessary, terminate the call to maintain a professional and supportive environment for everyone seeking assistance. This in no way contradicts our commitment to ensure that all individuals receive the care and support they deserve with dignity and respect.

## How to handle such a call

1. **Immediate Response:**
   * Remain calm and composed. Do not engage in the caller's behaviour or respond provocatively.
   * Redirect the conversation to the purpose of the helpline (support, information, resources).
2. **Establish Boundaries:**
   * Clearly and firmly communicate that the behaviour or language is inappropriate and violates the helpline's guidelines.
   * State that the call will be terminated if the behaviour continues.
     + Example: *“I need to let you know that the language/behaviour you're using right now is inappropriate and violates our helpline's guidelines. I must ask you to stop. If this continues, I will have to terminate the conversation and your access to our helpline may be suspended. Please understand that we are here to provide support respectfully and safely. Thank you.”*
3. **End the Call Appropriately:**
   * If the caller persists with inappropriate behaviour after a warning, politely end the call.
   * Use a neutral tone and avoid escalating the situation.
     + Example*: "I'm sorry, but I cannot continue this call. Goodbye."*
4. **Document the Incident:**
   * Record details of the call, including date, time, nature of the inappropriate behaviour, and actions taken as you would with any call. Then create a safeguarding referral for that user and repeat the information.
   * Let the on-call support person for that shift know what occurred immediately after the call ends.
5. **Support and Debriefing:**
   * Discuss the incident with the on-call support or experienced volunteer for guidance and debriefing.
   * Seek emotional support if needed, as handling such calls can be distressing.
   * Take time to consider if you need a break or whether you are able to continue with this shift.
6. **Safety Measures:**
   * If the caller's behaviour suggests a threat or potential harm, discuss with the on-call support re contacting local authorities to ensure your safety.

## What will Switchboard do?

If a caller is reported to the safeguarding team as being offensive or overtly sexualised, has ignored the requests to stop, and has been given a warning, we will:

1. Place a block on the service user’s IP address for web chat.
2. Add the service user’s phone number to our blocked callers list.
3. Automatically remove incoming emails from that user.

If the service user persists and finds another way around these blocks the safeguarding team will contact the police. Ideally, we would supply some contact information, but we can also report a withheld number to the police.

These guidelines aim to ensure that Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard Helpline volunteers work in a safe and respectful environment, while providing respectful, supportive, and informed assistance to callers discussing matters of a sexual nature and maintaining the organisation's commitment to confidentiality and empowerment.