



Why Life After Hate Declines Requests to Speak with our Clients

“Can I talk to your clients?”

Life After Hate is asked this question daily by law enforcement, journalists, academics, students, and curious citizens.

Law enforcement hopes to gain information from active or recently disengaged members of the movement about recruitment, vetting, future offenses, or past criminal behavior so they can address and prevent crime.

Journalists want to understand the phenomenon of violent extremism, the exit from violent extremist movements, and hear directly from the sources involved so they can ethically and accurately inform the public.

Academics and students need subjects for research into violent extremism, disengagement, deradicalization, and social justice, contributing to the body of scientific knowledge that informs policy and practice.

Often members of the public have been moved by the stories of Formers affiliated with Life After Hate, making them simultaneously curious and motivated to support our work in helping others in their journeys out of violent extremism and back into society.

These are all valid reasons to wish to speak with people who are actively engaged or in the process of exiting violent extremism. Life After Hate supports these efforts to protect, inform, and improve our understanding of violent extremism. However, these are not the primary goals of Life After Hate.

Our goals for every Exiting Individual client are a) disengagement from violent far right extremist (VFRE) online and offline behaviors and social networks, b) change in their violent far right beliefs and identities, and c) reintegration into society in prosocial roles and nonviolent social networks. Life After Hate is clear that our priority is the safety and wellbeing of our clients and society at large.

This means that the decisions and recommendations made to clients should align with our commitment to the safety of society, the client’s wellbeing, and exit from violent far right

Life After Hate, A 501c3 Non-Profit Organization
17 E. Monroe St., Suite 348, Chicago, IL 60603 U.S.

LifeAfterHate.org | info@lifeafterhate.org

 Life After Hate  @LifeAfterHate  LifeAfterHate

extremism. To achieve our goals, we must prioritize our professional obligations to protect our clients' rights and prioritize their wellbeing, while simultaneously protecting society from the threat of violent far right extremism.

All requests for information about our clients or to speak with our clients are considered with the following questions in mind:

Is the request to speak with a client or a staff member who is a Former?

A client is an individual who has signed an informed consent to case management and/or peer mentoring. These are individuals who are or were involved in violent far right extremism and may be at any stage in the process of disengaging, deradicalizing, and reintegrating into society in prosocial roles and relationships. We do not call our clients "formers," to maintain clarity about who we are serving, the expectations and boundaries of the relationship, and legal or ethical implications.

Life After Hate employs "Formers," people who were once involved in violent far right extremism, as peer mentors. Potential peer mentors are interviewed by a multidisciplinary team with a semi-structured interview to ensure they have met the standards for readiness and appropriateness to serve as a peer mentor. Readiness is defined by specific standards for disengagement, deradicalization, accountability, and reintegration. Appropriateness includes the necessary skills, attitudes, and motivations for being a peer mentor. Formers who are hired as peer mentors receive training, ongoing continuing education and development, supervision, and oversight by a licensed psychologist. Formers serving as peer mentors or in other roles within Life After Hate are empowered to make their own decisions about who, what, when, why, and how they will engage with speaking requests.

Does this request violate rights to privacy and confidentiality?

Nearly every client who is or was involved in VFRE wants to know what information we will ask about, what information we will document, and who has access to their information. They want to know if we are sharing what they tell us or who they are with law enforcement, the Department of Homeland Security, journalists, or if we're going to post their identities or private conversations online. They want to know if all current staff members or even past employees or volunteers have access to their information. Potential clients must be given accurate and transparent information about their privacy and confidentiality.

In our screening calls, texts, and emails we describe confidentiality and clarify the limits of confidentiality. The same information is provided in writing as a part of the informed consent process and notice of privacy practices. In short, all information about our clients, including their identities, locations, and information they share with us is confidential. They can talk to us about what they did in the past, what their friends did, who they spend time with online and offline, what they believe and how they feel. We endeavor to listen without judgment,



challenge them, and hold them accountable for violent and oppressive beliefs and behaviors. This information is confidential. We do not audio or video record our meetings with clients, nor do we allow others to observe our groups or one-on-one meetings. All documentation is stored in HIPAA-compliant spaces and only the current direct service staff can access that documentation.

Life After Hate is also clear with potential and current clients that there are times when we must and will disclose information from or about them to prevent serious and foreseeable harm to them or to others. We inform all clients that we will contact law enforcement or other appropriate persons or agencies if we learn of a credible threat of serious harm or death. We will disclose only the information necessary to access care for a client in cases of medical emergencies or if we are unable to ensure their safety from serious self-harm or suicide. Finally, we will report abuse or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult. When possible, clients are notified of these disclosures.

We collect and aggregate data to track trends in our client population (e.g., gender identity of our clients; what percent of our clients are involved in VFRE primarily online vs offline) and services (e.g., the average time in services; percent of clients referred to substance abuse treatment) for the purpose of improving our programs, services, outreach or to meet the requirements of our grants. This aggregated data cannot be traced to an individual or used to identify individuals or groups. Our priority is not the collection, aggregation, and dissemination of data about our clients, it is to serve our clients and facilitate their exit from violent extremism to the best of our ability.

Could this request affect trust and the working alliance?

It is essential that our social workers and the peer mentors build working relationships with our clients to be effective in challenging and supporting clients through the exit process. Clients must feel that the social worker and peer mentors care about their well-being and believe in their capacity for change. They must believe that exiting violent extremism is not only possible, but worth it no matter how distressing and difficult the process. It is only within the context of this working alliance that the social worker and peer mentor can challenge these beliefs and behaviors, make suggestions or requests, and hold clients accountable for their involvement in violent far right extremism. Asking our clients to speak with journalists, law enforcement, researchers, or students can make our population of clients especially suspicious that our primary goal is something other than promoting their exit from violent extremism, which damages what can often be a fragile but developing trust. Our priority is developing and maintaining the trusting working relationship with our clients.

Could this request directly or indirectly result in harm to others?

Violent far right extremism represents a threat to others. If a client is still in a violent extremist movement or at risk of rejoining a violent extremist movement and enabling, planning, or



committing violence our commitment must be to facilitating their exit from violent far right extremism. Any suggestions or requests we make of our clients must either facilitate exit or, at minimum, not interfere with exit. When we request or suggest that a client speak to someone outside of our organization it is typically to obtain services that address their needs, such as mental health or substance abuse treatment, and will further enable our work in supporting their exit from violent extremism. Our priority is facilitating exit from violent far right extremism, and preventing all forms of violence, to prevent harm to others.

Could this request harm the client?

Our professional ethics require us to do no harm to our clients. Individuals who are or were recently involved in violent far right extremism may be at risk for violent retribution from their group. Threats of violence are used to dissuade people from exiting, which causes further harm to the client and potentially to society if they feel they cannot safely leave the group and they continue to engage in violent extremism. Violent extremists who believed, with or without evidence, that our clients have spoken to law enforcement, journalists, or activists have threatened and, in some cases, physically or sexually assaulted our clients.

Even if there isn't a threat of physical violence, we must consider if a request to speak to our clients could cause other harm. Many of our clients have histories of child abuse and neglect, adult experiences of physical and sexual assault, and significant mental health or substance abuse challenges that are integral parts of their violent extremism story. During different stages of the process of exiting violent extremism our clients experience fear, anxiety, intense shame, and guilt. For some this experience will create so much discomfort they are at risk of falling back into violent extremism or engaging in other problematic coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse. Importantly, over half of our clients who are or were engaged in violent far right extremism report experiencing suicidal ideation at intake (an example of the aggregated client data we use to improve our services). Our priority is providing services that do not harm the client.

Will this request help our client or clients?

Life After Hate is deeply grateful for the many providers or organizations who have reached out to offer services or support that our clients may need. For example, services for tattoo cover-up or removal of hate symbols can be an essential step to changing one's identity and reintegrating into society. Faith-based organizations may provide education that dispels common antisemitic or anti-Muslim tropes and humanize the victims of VFRE hate groups. Community service organizations offer our clients the opportunity to engage in prosocial ways in their communities. In all cases, they are committed to providing services and engaging with our clients in a way that will directly or indirectly facilitate exit and reintegration, which aligns with our mission and goals. We tailor our referrals to each client's needs, stage of involvement and exit, level of insight and motivation. When we do make a referral to a party outside of Life



After Hate who isn't a service provider, we consider whether the experience could directly benefit the client's ongoing process of exiting violent extremism and reintegrating into society.

Final Thoughts

At Life After Hate, we recognize that there is much value to our civil society to hear directly from current and former violent extremists. For a Former, it can be an empowering experience, giving them a voice in an arena where they are treated with respect. For the community, it allows us to hear struggles and experiences we cannot possibly fathom, better understanding how hate comes to be and how it can be confronted.

Unfortunately, in seeking these stories and wanting to hear these experiences, too often individuals who are or were involved in violent extremism are put at physical and emotional risk as society "demands" they share their stories and revisit the worst moments in their lives. In our quest to hear these stories, we push people to share before they are ready to do so, putting their recovery, their second chapter, and their very lives at risk.

As requests for these stories of and detailed information about the lived experience of violent extremism continue to grow, it is essential for organizations like Life After Hate to be clear that we endeavor to put the needs and care of our clients first and foremost. The first question we ask is "what is best for the client and how does this promote their exit from violent extremism?" Consistent with this best-practice, requests to speak with our clients will be denied.

About tertiary intervention at Life After Hate:

Life After Hate supports individuals who are disengaging and deradicalizing from violent movements that promote white supremacist, antisemitic, anti-LGBTQ+, misogynist, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and anti-government beliefs. Staffed by social workers and former violent extremists, we provide case management based on the National Association of Social Workers standards, psychoeducation, skills training, and peer mentoring. We believe intervention characterized by compassion with accountability is essential to facilitating an individual's exit from violent extremism, which ultimately prevents future acts of violence and contributes to a safer society.

This type of intervention is one part of a comprehensive approach to preventing and countering violent extremism. Our work only addresses individuals and their immediate environments and social networks. We rely on other activists and organizations to address the cultural and structural factors that contribute to the propagation of violent far right extremism (VFRE).



Addendum

The following principles and standards that inform our decision to decline requests to speak with our clients are listed below. This is by no means an exhaustive list but provides detail from the practice codes of ethics that inform our work.

National Association of Social Workers

<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

1.01 Commitment to Clients

Social workers' primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of clients. In general, clients' interests are primary. However, social workers' responsibility to the larger society or specific legal obligations may, on limited occasions, supersede the loyalty owed clients, and clients should be so advised. (Examples include when a social worker is required by law to report that a client has abused a child or has threatened to harm self or others.)

1.06 Conflicts of Interest

(a) Social workers should be alert to and avoid conflicts of interest that interfere with the exercise of professional discretion and impartial judgment. Social workers should inform clients when a real or potential conflict of interest arises and take reasonable steps to resolve the issue in a manner that makes the clients' interests primary and protects clients' interests to the greatest extent possible. In some cases, protecting clients' interests may require termination of the professional relationship with proper referral of the client.

(b) Social workers should not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship or exploit others to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.

1.07 Privacy and confidentiality:

(k) Social workers should protect the confidentiality of clients when responding to requests from members of the media.

1.14 Clients Who Lack Decision-Making Capacity

When social workers act on behalf of clients who lack the capacity to make informed decisions, social workers should take reasonable steps to safeguard the interests and rights of those clients.

4.07 Solicitations

(b) Social workers should not engage in solicitation of testimonial endorsements (including



solicitation of consent to use a client's prior statement as a testimonial endorsement) from current clients or from other people who, because of their particular circumstances, are vulnerable to undue influence.

6.04 Social and Political Action

(d) Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical ability.

5.02 Evaluation and Research

(d) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should carefully consider possible consequences and should follow guidelines developed for the protection of evaluation and research participants. Appropriate institutional review boards should be consulted.

(e) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should obtain voluntary and written informed consent from participants, when appropriate, without any implied or actual deprivation or penalty for refusal to participate; without undue inducement to participate; and with due regard for participants' well-being, privacy, and dignity. Informed consent should include information about the nature, extent, and duration of the participation requested and disclosure of the risks and benefits of participation in the research.

(f) When using electronic technology to facilitate evaluation or research, social workers should ensure that participants provide informed consent for the use of such technology. Social workers should assess whether participants are able to use the technology and, when appropriate, offer reasonable alternatives to participate in the evaluation or research.

(g) When evaluation or research participants are incapable of giving informed consent, social workers should provide an appropriate explanation to the participants, obtain the participants' assent to the extent they are able, and obtain written consent from an appropriate proxy.

(h) Social workers should never design or conduct evaluation or research that does not use consent procedures, such as certain forms of naturalistic observation and archival research, unless rigorous and responsible review of the research has found it to be justified because of its prospective scientific, educational, or applied value and unless equally effective alternative procedures that do not involve waiver of consent are not feasible.



(p) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should be alert to and avoid conflicts of interest and dual relationships with participants, should inform participants when a real or potential conflict of interest arises, and should take steps to resolve the issue in a manner that makes participants' interests primary.

American Psychological Association

<https://www.apa.org/ethics/code>

Principle A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence

Psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm. In their professional actions, psychologists seek to safeguard the welfare and rights of those with whom they interact professionally and other affected persons, and the welfare of animal subjects of research. When conflicts occur among psychologists' obligations or concerns, they attempt to resolve these conflicts in a responsible fashion that avoids or minimizes harm. Because psychologists' scientific and professional judgments and actions may affect the lives of others, they are alert to and guard against personal, financial, social, organizational, or political factors that might lead to misuse of their influence. Psychologists strive to be aware of the possible effect of their own physical and mental health on their ability to help those with whom they work.

Principle B: Fidelity and Responsibility

Psychologists establish relationships of trust with those with whom they work. They are aware of their professional and scientific responsibilities to society and to the specific communities in which they work. Psychologists uphold professional standards of conduct, clarify their professional roles and obligations, accept appropriate responsibility for their behavior, and seek to manage conflicts of interest that could lead to exploitation or harm. Psychologists consult with, refer to, or cooperate with other professionals and institutions to the extent needed to serve the best interests of those with whom they work. They are concerned about the ethical compliance of their colleagues' scientific and professional conduct. Psychologists strive to contribute a portion of their professional time for little or no compensation or personal advantage.

Principle E: Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

Psychologists respect the dignity and worth of all people, and the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination. Psychologists are aware that special safeguards may be necessary to protect the rights and welfare of persons or communities whose vulnerabilities impair autonomous decision making. Psychologists are aware of and respect



cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status, and consider these factors when working with members of such groups. Psychologists try to eliminate the effect on their work of biases based on those factors, and they do not knowingly participate in or condone activities of others based upon such prejudices.

1.03 Conflicts Between Ethics and Organizational Demands

If the demands of an organization with which psychologists are affiliated or for whom they are working are in conflict with this Ethics Code, psychologists clarify the nature of the conflict, make known their commitment to the Ethics Code, and take reasonable steps to resolve the conflict consistent with the General Principles and Ethical Standards of the Ethics Code. Under no circumstances may this standard be used to justify or defend violating human rights.

3.04 Avoiding Harm

(a) Psychologists take reasonable steps to avoid harming their clients/patients, students, supervisees, research participants, organizational clients, and others with whom they work, and to minimize harm where it is foreseeable and unavoidable.

3.05 Multiple Relationships

(a) A multiple relationship occurs when a psychologist is in a professional role with a person and (1) at the same time is in another role with the same person, (2) at the same time is in a relationship with a person closely associated with or related to the person with whom the psychologist has the professional relationship, or (3) promises to enter into another relationship in the future with the person or a person closely associated with or related to the person. A psychologist refrains from entering into a multiple relationship if the multiple relationship could reasonably be expected to impair the psychologist's objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing his or her functions as a psychologist, or otherwise risks exploitation or harm to the person with whom the professional relationship exists.

3.06 Conflict of Interest

Psychologists refrain from taking on a professional role when personal, scientific, professional, legal, financial, or other interests or relationships could reasonably be expected to (1) impair their objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing their functions as psychologists or (2) expose the person or organization with whom the professional relationship exists to harm or exploitation.



4.01 Maintaining Confidentiality

Psychologists have a primary obligation and take reasonable precautions to protect confidential information obtained through or stored in any medium, recognizing that the extent and limits of confidentiality may be regulated by law or established by institutional rules or professional or scientific relationship.

4.03 Recording

Before recording the voices or images of individuals to whom they provide services, psychologists obtain permission from all such persons or their legal representatives. (See also Standards 8.03, Informed Consent for Recording Voices and Images in Research; 8.05, Dispensing with Informed Consent for Research ; and 8.07, Deception in Research.)

4.04 Minimizing Intrusions on Privacy

(a)

Psychologists include in written and oral reports and consultations, only information germane to the purpose for which the communication is made.

(b) Psychologists discuss confidential information obtained in their work only for appropriate scientific or professional purposes and only with persons clearly concerned with such matters.

4.07 Use of Confidential Information for Didactic or Other Purposes

Psychologists do not disclose in their writings, lectures, or other public media, confidential, personally identifiable information concerning their clients/patients, students, research participants, organizational clients, or other recipients of their services that they obtained during the course of their work, unless (1) they take reasonable steps to disguise the person or organization, (2) the person or organization has consented in writing, or (3) there is legal authorization for doing so.

5.04 Media Presentations

When psychologists provide public advice or comment via print, Internet, or other electronic transmission, they take precautions to ensure that statements (1) are based on their professional knowledge, training, or experience in accord with appropriate psychological literature and practice; (2) are otherwise consistent with this Ethics Code; and (3) do not indicate that a professional relationship has been established with the recipient.

5.05 Testimonials

Psychologists do not solicit testimonials from current therapy clients/patients or other persons who because of their particular circumstances are vulnerable to undue influence.

8.02 Informed Consent to Research



(a) When obtaining informed consent as required in Standard 3.10, Informed Consent, psychologists inform participants about (1) the purpose of the research, expected duration, and procedures; (2) their right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the research once participation has begun; (3) the foreseeable consequences of declining or withdrawing; (4) reasonably foreseeable factors that may be expected to influence their willingness to participate such as potential risks, discomfort, or adverse effects; (5) any prospective research benefits; (6) limits of confidentiality; (7) incentives for participation; and (8) whom to contact for questions about the research and research participants' rights. They provide opportunity for the prospective participants to ask questions and receive answers.

