

Topic 4.3: Breaking confidentiality: Mandatory reporting

We talked about always keeping everything private and confidential in research. But there are exceptions for this rule. Let's talk about when we can't keep things private and confidential.



We talked about keeping all information participants share private and confidential. But, sometimes you can't keep all this information private and confidential. For example, if someone is being hurt or abused, you have to tell someone.



Sharing information that will keep someone safe is a way to take care of people. **Mandatory reporting** is when you share information about someone being hurt or abused, or if they are hurting or abusing someone else.

States have their own laws about mandatory reporting—your project leader will talk more about this law where you are doing your research project.

If it seems possible that mandatory reporting may come up in your project, it is important to tell people that you may not be able to keep everything they share private and confidential at the beginning of the study.

By telling people about this right away, they can make their own decision about being in the study and what they share during research. Information about mandatory reporting can be included in the consent meeting and participants can be reminded during the study.

If someone starts to share something you might need to report, you can interrupt them to remind them that you might have to break confidentiality.

If research participants do or say something that makes you worried, or you see something that makes you worried, you should let your project leader know right away. The project leader will work with you to figure out what to do next to keep the research participant safe.

It can be hard when you have to break confidentiality. The person really trusted you with their information and may be upset that you shared it. Or, the information they shared might lead to changes in their lives. You may never know what happens to the participant but remember, you are sharing this information because you care about the research participants.



Mental Health for All Team Talks About Mandatory Reporting



Brendan: Since we were talking to people about their mental health, we knew we might hear some people say they had thoughts about hurting themselves. So, we made sure it was really clear to people who were thinking about being in our study that we would have to tell someone else if they shared that they were thinking about hurting themselves.



Micah: We knew how hard it would be if someone shared this kind of information. So, we also came up with a plan about calling the project leader and staying with the person until Ariel or Katie was there.

Brendan: We practiced different types of situations to also help us figure out what kind of information we might need to report and how to help the person when they shared it.

Micah: We also practiced interrupting people to remind them we would have to report if they shared something about hurting themselves. Practicing really helped us feel prepared!



Katie: We also decided that for some of the information we wanted to learn, we didn't need to know who was sharing it. So, we also did a survey and didn't ask people to share their names or other personal information.