

H. Handling Conversations Dealing with Criminal Activity

The number of conversations of a criminal nature seem to be increasing as culture supports a less biblical view of moral right and wrong and as people devalue Absolute Truth. These conversations can be very sensitive and difficult for both the volunteer and the guest. Many guests will have guilt over past / current criminal activity or may be contemplating future acts of violence. Others may be sharing their experience as a victim or someone that has been the subject of inappropriate activity. If you learn of such actions or behaviors, please alert a Team Leader/System Administrator for evaluation and potential action.

There are three broad-based categories of criminal activity the Ministry uses in evaluation:

- **Property Crimes** – Includes crimes involving property (damage, theft, destruction, etc.)
- **Personal Crimes** – Includes crimes against or involving other individuals (assault, murder, abuse, rape, incest, etc.)
- **Terror-Related Crimes** – Includes threats of violence or death against property or individuals.

It is important to look at context as each of these types may involve a heightened level of scrutiny or action.

What To Look For:

- **TIMING** - Determine whether the conduct in question is a past action, a recent action or something being planned.
- **AUTHORITY INVOLVEMENT** - Ascertain whether the conduct has already been addressed by law enforcement authorities, is currently being handled or is yet to be reported.
- **VICTIMS** - Look to understand whether other persons were or will be harmed versus the conduct being self-inflicted.
- **DETAILS** - Determine whether specifically identifiable information about the person and conduct has been shared. This includes information such as full names, accomplices, specific addresses or locations, and dates or details of the conduct.

We are NOT asking you to play investigator or determine the appropriate legal response to any reported conduct. You should NOT dig for details but should use common sense to collect information as you have the conversation. All Terror-Related threats, regardless of how much information you glean, should be reported to Administrators for evaluation and potential action.

We encourage you to use great discretion as many Seekers may confess or share a past activity (abuse, rape, criminal actions, etc....). It is important to ***gently probe*** to determine if they are simply sharing their past for personal context. Many will share a past pain as they are seeking hope for the future. As you listen to their story, you need to evaluate the TIMING, AUTHORITY INVOLVEMENT, VICTIMS and DETAILS. If you are uncertain, please feel free to reach out to a Team Leader/System Administrator.

What To Do Next:

- Don't make assumptions about the conversation. If a seeker simply asks about God's ability to forgive an action, don't assume the Seeker has engaged in criminal activity or is planning to do so. Many may be asking because of a close family member who has fallen into bad decisions or for other innocent reasons.
- Do NOT promise you will keep the information confidential. You can let people know we may have a legal obligation to report information in some cases. If pressed, you can simply say the ministry leadership makes that determination.
- IN CLEAR CASES OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY, you should note personal and relevant information (full names, places, dates, time of day, plans or detail of the crime, etc.) but you should always adhere to the Code of Conduct and not seek to collect any personal information. You are not asked to "build a case" or collect all the information. **YOU SHOULD NEVER REACH OUT DIRECTLY TO ANY LAW ENFORCEMENT.**
- Select the Criminal Activity Flag in Echo from the drop-down menu when closing the conversation and the ministry team will be alerted.

Volunteers should always be in control of the conversation. You are never asked to put yourself in a position where believe this could be dangerous. If at any time, you feel uncertain, please feel free to transfer to a Team Leader/ System Administrator for review.

Conversations related to potential criminal activity that do not meet these criteria should be managed according to normal ministry conversation guidelines with no need to report to Administrators. Examples of these include:

- A non-violent crime (such as shoplifting or stealing) in the past where the Seeker is simply working through guilt.
- A crime where the local authorities have already been involved and the issue has been resolved (through punishment or no charges being sought).

A closing thought on conversations about potential criminal activity with minors. There are instances when we know the seeker is a minor. We remind you to be extra careful and cautious when speaking to them. Encourage them to talk with their parents, teachers, school counselor or youth leader for additional help.