



Connecting Trust Volunteer Policy

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(This Policy can be reviewed and updated every 6 months)

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Trustee

CONNECTING TRUST
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About Connecting Trust

Connecting Trust is a volunteer based, listening service in Pune, established in 2005 by Mrs. Arnavaz Damania, that aims to prevent suicide by-

1. **Offering emotional support** to those feeling low, distressed, and/or suicidal
2. **Capacity building** within high risk, low income communities to enhance their ability in responding to distress and suicide.
3. **Creating awareness** about suicide amongst various demographics thereby reducing the stigma associated with it.

Connecting's mission of saving lives is driven by four strong programs:

1. **Distress Helpline Program (DHP)**- A non-judgmental, non-advisory, confidential and anonymous listening service for those feeling stressed, distressed and/or suicidal. Emotional support is provided via three mediums -
 - Telephonic service (daily 12 pm - 8 pm),
 - Distress email facility for those who prefer writing
 - Walk-In Facility for those who prefer face to face conversations
2. **Suicide Survivor Support Program (SSP)**- An outreach program that provides emotional support to survivors of suicide along with their families, via
 - Telephonic- SSP TESSS
 - Hospital visits
 - Community visits.

Connecting also focuses on building support groups within resource poor communities to augment self-reliance when dealing with distress and suicide.
3. **Peer Educators Program (PEP)**- A year long program that equips adolescents (ages 12-14) in schools to-
 - identify their distress and develop coping strategies to tackle it
 - thereafter identify distress in their classmates and respond to it adequately and involve relevant stakeholders such as the counselor, parents and teachers, thus, developing an ecosystem of support
4. **Awareness Program**- A one touch program that educates diverse vulnerable communities, online and offline, customized to their need, regarding mental well being and coping with emotional distress.



Connecting's Team comprises-

- **Volunteers and Mentors-** individuals who freely offer to take part and drive Connecting's Programs
- **Employees-** Executive Director, Program Coordinators, Administrator and Accountant
<https://connectingngo.org/about-us/leadership-team/>
- **Board of Trustees and Advisory Board Members-** An appointed or elected group of individuals that has overall responsibility for the management of an organization.
<https://connectingngo.org/about-us/leadership-team/>

Eligibility and selection process to volunteer in Connecting Trust's Programs

- All volunteers must be minimum 21 years of age. Volunteers must undergo a screening process for the program they have chosen to volunteer with.
- Volunteers are selected based on their commitment, capabilities and alignment to Connecting Trust's Principles. Selection is regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion and disability.
- Once selected volunteers must successfully complete the Connecting Trust's volunteer training.

Before a session/field visit/distress call/distress mail

For Awareness/PEP/SSP sessions, volunteers are required to collaborate with partner volunteers & the program coordinator regarding-

- Understanding the objectives and ground rules for the session
- Understanding the volunteer role in the said session. It is important that the volunteer conduct reflects the role allotted - whether as facilitator, presenter or a silent observer.
- Incorporating said session objectives during interactions while being mindful of Connecting's Principles.
- Incorporating any extra information the Program Coordinator may have garnered from the in-house counselor at the school/hospital/corporate regarding the issues that specific audience faces.



During a session/field visit/distress call/distress mail

- Volunteers should arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the visit/slot/session and conduct a grounding activity before getting dispersed in small teams/pairs or getting on a slot.
- Volunteers must carry out the visit/session/slot in pairs.
- Dress Code-

Volunteers should be mindful that they will be representatives of Connecting trust, it is important that their attire and their conduct are in line with Connecting's Principles when volunteering. The dress code is simple professional attire.

Attire for all programs should be chosen considering the requirements and comfort of the audience/participants/walk-ins, such as western/ Indian formal wear for corporate awareness and Indian wear when volunteering in community areas.

- During the visit/call volunteers can share their first (true for SSP/PEP/Awareness and pseudo name for Helpline) name (and not surname and address) to the audience/caller/mailler.
- Wearing of Connecting ID Cards are compulsory while on the field.
- Mobile phones should not be used when on the field and during the visits/slot. Receiving calls and messaging during the visit or while talking with the speakers, stakeholders should be strictly avoided.
- A distress mail or a text message for SSP TESSS, must be replied to within 24 hours of receipt.
- Photography/ Video shooting/ Audio recording on the field is to be done with consent of Connecting Trust in order to maintain the confidentiality of participants. With consent, photographs can be taken of the backs of audiences.
- Volunteers are required to maintain adequate physical distance from external stakeholders/walk-ins and try to engage with individuals of the same gender to ensure their comfort as well as the volunteer's. Volunteers should prioritise their own safety, ensure that a male volunteer is present when in the community and avoid engaging with individuals under the influence. If fliers with details of Connecting are available at site with the institution/community, such individuals may be politely guided towards them.
- Volunteers must refrain from initiating emotional support 30 minutes prior to leaving, whilst on the field.
- During the visit, in case of any major issues, situations, fights, arguments, stoppages of the visit, police interventions, authorities requesting stoppages of the visit, curfews, riots etc. the volunteers have the authority to cease the visit depending on the situation at hand and update the coordinator. Volunteer safety is top priority and the team leaders must lead the team to a safe spot (preferably a local police station or chowki nearby).



- Confidentiality is to the extent permissible under the law. In certain situations (such as, but not limited to the POCSO Act), it is mandatory to report said callers/distress emailers/participants in a session. The POCSO Act makes it mandatory to report any cases that involve an immediate sexual threat, intimidation and harassment of minors. Volunteers who come across such cases should fill the Incident Report immediately. In the event Connecting is required to assist the police authorities in further investigation in the case, the volunteer may be required to assist the Connecting Program Coordinator for the same.

After a session/field visit/distress call/distress mail

- Volunteers are required to set aside 2 hours post a slot/visit/ session. This is speaker/audience continues talking after the decided time, additionally 1 hour for debriefing or documentation. Debriefing and documentation are compulsory after every slot/session.

Volunteers are encouraged to maintain all of the above.

Sharing of Connecting Trust's Content Externally

- Prior to sharing any content (online, print, audio-visual media) relating to Connecting Trust, volunteers are required to run this past their mentor/program coordinator. This is to ensure volunteers are complying with Connecting's confidentiality and anonymity clause. This includes refraining from mentioning the name, gender, location, designation, or any detail related to the identity of the caller/mailer/walk-in. If needed callers/mailers/walk-ins can be referred to in plural via generalized references.
- Connecting Trust's presentations/content/trainings are not allowed to be shared or used outside of the organization without keeping the organization apprised of the same.

Exit Procedure

- If a volunteer/mentor feels, the work in suicide prevention is impeding their mental health, they are requested to take a break as per their and the organization's decision.
- If a Program Coordinator/mentor feels a volunteer's mental health is being adversely affected, the program coordinator is to discuss the way forward on a case by case basis with said volunteer, the Executive Director and a mentor. This could involve the volunteer being formally requested to take a break for a month, and to assess the way forward based on that.
- Volunteers on a break for 3-6 months must undergo a refresher. Volunteers inactive for 6 months to a year are to undergo a refresher or an internal training based on the decision made by the program coordinator, mentors and the recruitment in charge. Volunteers inactive for a year must undergo the internal training.



- Trainers on a break from Connecting Trust's programs for 3-6 months must undergo a refresher. Trainers inactive for 6 months to a year are to undergo a refresher or an internal training based on the decision made by the program coordinator, mentors and the recruitment in charge.
- Connecting reserves the right to ask a volunteer to leave the organisation with immediate effect, in cases of grave misconduct, verbal outbursts, violence, unwarranted demands or hostility. The decision in such cases is at the sole discretion of Connecting Trust.

Desirable Disclosures

- Volunteers related to/or in a relationship with (including romantic/for profit) with other volunteers/ employees/ associates of Connecting are requested to disclose this information in confidence to the Executive Director/ Program Coordinator.
- Volunteers seeking support from mental health professionals are requested to disclose this information in confidence to the Executive Director/ Program Coordinator.
- Prior to leaving any Connecting Trust's online groups/forums volunteers are requested to inform the Program Coordinator before doing the same.

Conflict Resolution

Anti-Discriminatory and Anti Sexual Harassment Committee (ADSH Committee)

- Maintaining respect, compassion, empathy and equality (in regards to gender, ethnicity and disability) within the team (volunteers, mentors and staff at Connecting) is paramount. If a volunteer is made to feel differently because of their gender, ethnicity and religion, a formal complaint is to be submitted to the anti discriminatory cell. Sexual harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behavior (whether directly or by implication) as:
 1. physical contact and advances;
 2. a demand or request for sexual favors;
 3. sexually colored remarks;
 4. showing pornography;
 5. any other unwelcome physical verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

Any gender (male, female, transgender) that is subjected to the above, a formal complaint is to be submitted to the ADSH Committee via email- connectingtrustadshcommittee@gmail.com

The ADSH cell comprises 5 individuals; two trustees (Capt Ashwani Bhakoo, and Adv Gandha Sahu) an individual from a third party organization (Binty Mehta from Aks Foundation) specializing in the matter, the Executive Director and the program coordinator. If the complaint involves the trustee or Executive Director on the cell, another trustee and program coordinator must be instituted in their place. The cell is to meet once a quarter and resolve issues related to the above-mentioned issues on a case by case basis.



- Connecting acknowledges that its office is not friendly for individuals living with disabilities, but is in the process of collaborating with an NGO to see how that could be rectified

General Grievance Redressal

- If a volunteer has concerns for the program (that is not discriminatory, sexual harassment or related to a debrief), the Collaborative Feedback form needs to be filled. This can be viewed by the Executive Director and an objective third party outside of the program. Upon doing so, the volunteer will be assigned to a program coordinator/mentor/or other volunteer to work on said issue. Mutual responsibility in such situations will be encouraged

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ebqVPdJV08qLGM1hOgFyDmp7rJKt4gTH7-OQhMFRi2I/edit>