



INFORMATION

ABOUT THE NETHERLANDS
ASSOCIATION OF CONFIDENTIAL
COUNSELLORS AND THE PROFESSION
OF CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLOR



**Landelijke
Vereniging van
Vertrouwenspersonen**
ondersteunen & professionaliseren

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION

The Netherlands Association of Confidential Counsellors is a professional association of confidential counsellors specialising in workplace misconduct, professional ethics issues, or a combination of both.

The Association is dedicated to representing the interests of, and providing support to, its members. Secondary objectives of the Association include the further development and recognition of the profession of confidential counsellor, and the improvement and monitoring of the quality of professional practice. The Association also maintains close ties with government authorities, political parties and various stakeholders. The Netherlands Association of Confidential Counsellors aims to increase its visibility as the leading expertise centre and professional association in its field in the Netherlands.

It is engaged in developing a variety of activities which can support confidential counsellors in optimising their professional practice.

These activities include:

- raising the Association's profile and safeguarding the statutory protections for the legal position of confidential counsellors;
- building and maintaining relationships with third parties;
- further developing the quality standards and certification of confidential counsellors specialising in workplace conduct, professional ethics issues, or a combination of both;
- updating the professional profile and job descriptions;
- drafting a template letter of employment for in-house confidential counsellors;
- drafting a contract template for external confidential counsellors;
- creating a blueprint for a registration system for reporting workplace misconduct and professional ethics issues within organisations;
- organising an annual conference, along with networking meetings, seminars and workshops.

WHAT ARE CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS?

Confidential counsellors are employed by an organisation (in-house confidential counsellors) or by a third party contracted by the organisation (external confidential counsellors). Employees of the organisation who experience inappropriate behaviour or are confronted with professional ethics issues can contact a confidential counsellor on a strictly confidential basis if they need someone to confide in and give them advice and support.

Confidential counsellors are bound by both confidentiality and a duty of care. By virtue of their role, confidential counsellors also have a duty of confidentiality and the right of non-disclosure within the organisation. They are only accountable to the highest authority within the organisation and are not obliged to share information relating to individual cases with others.

WHAT DOES THE ROLE OF CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLOR ENTAIL?

Employees in all organisations may experience workplace misconduct (including sexual harassment, aggression and violence, bullying and discrimination), both from colleagues and from managers, and/or be confronted with ethical issues (including misconduct with societal relevance, irregularities, and other issues relating to professional ethics).

These various forms of workplace misconduct have a major impact on the work environment and on employee health and well-being. Employers are required by law to provide their employees with a safe working environment, and appointing a confidential counsellor is an easy and effective way for employers to meet this obligation. It is also an essential part of fostering a healthy work environment and encouraging the best possible performance by employees within the organisation. The



same is true when it comes to dealing with ethical issues. Confidential counsellors specialising in these issues play an important role and serve as a key point of contact for employees. In addition, people looking to report an incident without having to reveal their identity can do so safely through the confidential counsellor for professional ethics issues, who will act as an intermediary on their behalf in dealings with the organisation.

Confidential counsellors operate independently within the organisation, without having to be instructed by or consult with anyone. At least once a year, they render account of their practice to the highest authority in the organisation on an anonymous basis.

Confidential counsellors have three key duties.

1. SUPPORTING, ASSISTING AND INFORMING EMPLOYEES

- Providing support and acting as an initial point of contact for employees who have experienced workplace misconduct or have been confronted with professional ethics issues. Assisting the person filing the report in order to review what measures might be taken to resolve the issue at hand or initiate an investigation into the issue.
- Referring the person in question to professional counsellors and legal advisers if the case in question is beyond

the remit of the confidential counsellor or concerns issues other than workplace misconduct or professional ethics issues.

- Assisting and supporting those filing reports with the complaints board (for cases involving workplace misconduct) or investigative committee (for cases involving professional ethics issues) and providing aftercare.

2. ADVISING, INFORMING AND INSPIRING THE ORGANISATION

- Raising awareness about workplace misconduct and professional ethics issues, and the role of confidential counsellors in handling these issues.
- Providing information to employees, managers and board members on the prevention of inappropriate behaviour and professional ethics issues and promoting exemplary, transparent and honest behaviour in the company or organisation.
- Consulting and coordinating with partners such as the health and safety service, company doctors, company social workers and employee representative bodies.
- Contributing to awareness-raising sessions initiated by the management with the objective of making employees aware of what constitutes appropriate conduct within the organisation as well as open, transparent and honest behaviour.

3. ADVISING THE BOARD AND MANAGEMENT

- Confidential counsellors prepare an annual summary, which contains trends and key points arising out of the reports received within the organisation (including details relating to frequency and the types of issues involved). During an annual meeting with the organisation's management, the confidential counsellor provides context for the findings detailed in the annual report, including the Risk Assessment & Evaluation (RA&E) and results of employee satisfaction surveys.
- Confidential counsellors must stay alert to any signals regarding interpersonal safety in the organisation. They advise the management – both on request and at their own initiative, and always in an anonymous format – on the work environment, workplace misconduct, appropriate conduct in the workplace, and non-transparent and dishonest behaviour, if the reports they receive so require. Wherever possible, they provide practical suggestions for improvement or help come up with solutions.

In addition to issues involving workplace misconduct and professional ethics issues, confidential counsellors are also likely to be confronted with issues related to performance reviews, job appraisals, reorganisations, work conflicts and personal problems. These issues are, by definition, beyond the remit of the confidential counsellor, unless they result in workplace misconduct or dishonest behaviour. The role of confidential counsellor is irreconcilable with being a member of any complaints board for workplace misconduct or investigative committee for professional ethics issues. Furthermore, confidential counsellors cannot be employees of HR departments, members of employee representative bodies or members of senior or executive management. A managerial position need not form an impediment to holding the position of confidential counsellor, provided that there are also confidential

counsellors in non-managerial positions within the organisation.

ABOUT CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS

Confidential counsellors must possess certain qualities, skills and knowledge and are selected based on the following criteria:

- Undergraduate degree or equivalent work experience;
- Confidential counsellor training in accordance with the requirements and core values set by the Netherlands Association of Confidential Counsellors;
- Minimum of 8 hours a year of continuing education, or as much as required by the organisation.

Confidential counsellors should possess the following qualities:

1. QUALITIES

Confidential counsellors:

- are accessible, empathetic and courageous;
- are independent and strategic thinkers who are able to recognise the various interests involved, operate in conflict situations and maintain a professional distance from the cases they handle;
- have an astute sense of human behaviour, interpersonal relationships and organisational culture;
- can get to the heart of situations which might give rise to workplace misconduct or professional ethics issues;
- can enquire in a non-judgemental way as to the motivation of the person filing the report and ask them about the avenues they would like to explore;
- must possess strong reflective skills;
- must be able to provide good and clear feedback;
- are resistant to environmental pressure and scrupulously adhere to social, ethical and professional values and standards.

2. SKILLS

Confidential counsellors:

- must be good listeners and know when to be silent;
- must be honest, reliable and have strong communication skills, as well as possessing organisational sensitivity and strategic insight;
- reflect on their own behaviour and viewpoints and can encourage others to reflect on their behaviour and their relationships with, and treatment of, others;
- can write anonymous reports and make recommendations to the management;
- possess the ability to pick up signals and provide advice, and have the analytical skills to provide policy advice relating to professional ethics, health and safety;
- must be able to give persuasive, clear presentations.

3. KNOWLEDGE

Confidential counsellors:

- have insight into social phenomena such as discrimination, violence and aggression, harassment and intimidation (including sexual harassment), bullying and conflicts and/or professional ethics issues;
- are up-to-date on the relevant laws, regulations and procedures;

- are aware of their powers and responsibilities and the organisational structure within which they operate;
- keep up-to-date on new trends and developments by reading professional journals, attending conferences and training courses, and through peer review.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS AFFILIATED WITH THE NETHERLANDS ASSOCIATION OF CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS

This Code of Conduct serves as a guideline for the professional conduct of the confidential counsellors affiliated with the Netherlands Association of Confidential Counsellors.

The Code of Conduct serves as:

- an information resource for employees contacting the confidential counsellor;
- an information resource for the organisation where the confidential counsellor conducts their practice and/or by which they have been employed;
- a benchmark for the Supervisory Committee of the Netherlands Association of Confidential Counsellors in assessing the confidential counsellor's professional practice.



WHAT DO CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS REQUIRE?

In order for the confidential counsellor to perform their duties as required within an organisation, the organisation must ensure that the following conditions are in place:

1. COMMITMENT

Engagement and support on the part of the organisation's management and board.

2. FACILITIES

Confidential counsellors must have access to adequate facilities, tools and resources.

3. BUDGET

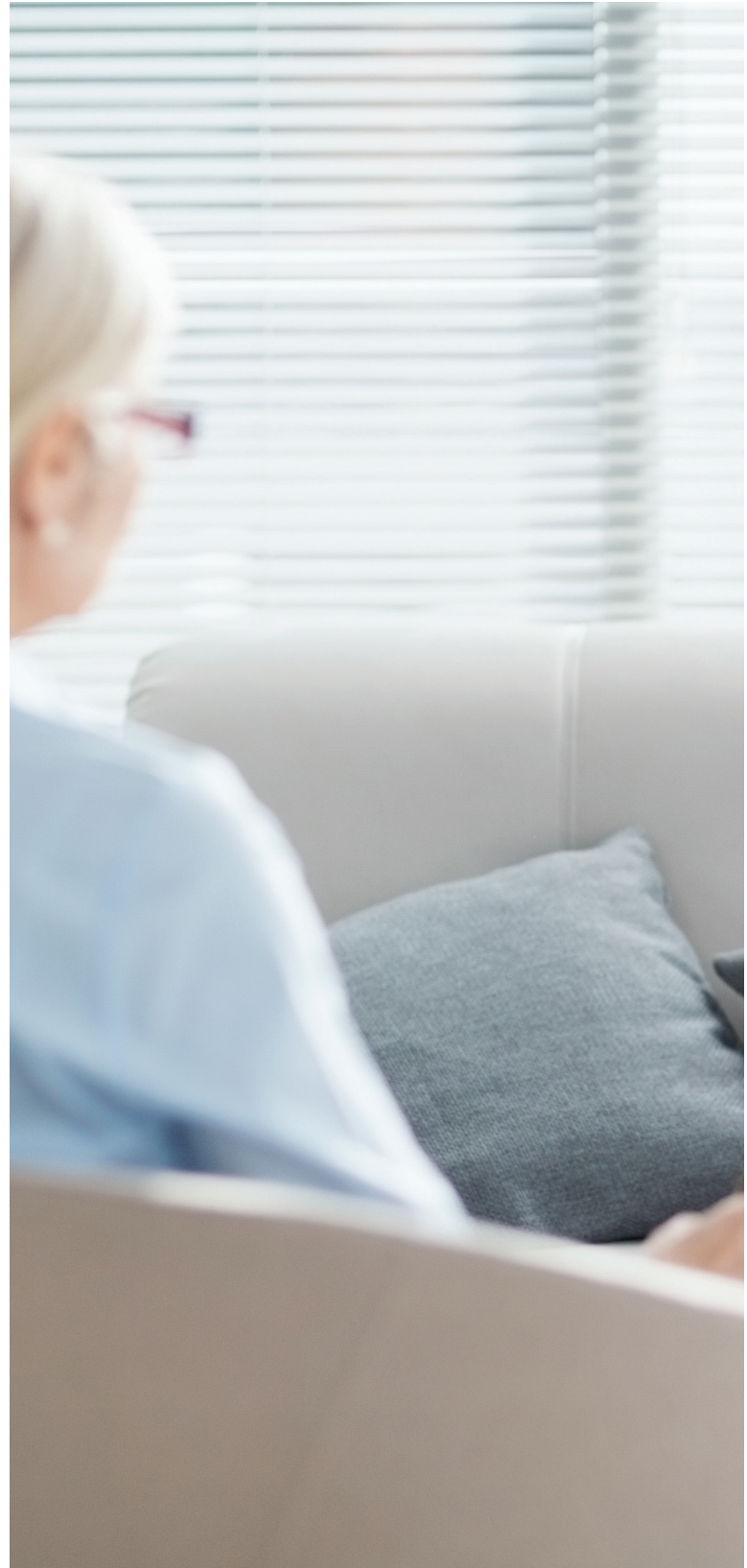
Confidential counsellors must have recourse to the budget for attending an accredited basic training course, continuing education, peer review, purchase of informational materials and professional journals, membership of professional associations and, if necessary, discussing cases outside the organisation.

4. TIME

Confidential counsellors must be given sufficient time to perform their duties, for professional advancement, and for discussion with representatives of other disciplines. A time frame of two hours a week should be used as a guideline.

5. PROTECTION

The confidential counsellor's professional practice must never result in decisions being made that have negative implications for their legal position.





NETHERLANDS ASSOCIATION OF CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS QUALITY LABEL FOR TRAINING COURSES

In order to be eligible for the Netherlands Association of Confidential Counsellors quality label, any institution that provides basic training or continuing education for confidential counsellors must ensure that graduates of their programme possess the competencies listed to a sufficient degree.

The training course must assess:

- the confidential counsellor's knowledge;
- their understanding of the different types of cases they may be faced with (both in writing and in face-to-face sessions);
- their understanding of the specific behaviours and emotional responses that are typical of employees filing reports and of the subjects of those reports.



CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS CERTIFIED BY THE NETHERLANDS ASSOCIATION OF CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS

The certification of confidential counsellors has been outsourced to an independent agency. The Netherlands Association of Confidential Counsellors is the body responsible for setting the requirements for certification, which are then assessed by this agency. The Association believes it is important to have a clear and high-quality system in place for the certification of confidential counsellors. Confidential Counsellors certified by the Association have been assessed on the basis of the above-mentioned criteria for confidential counsellors.





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