



Standard 2.3 – Case Study

When confidential information may need to be disclosed.

Background

As an ICF Professional, I have a clear agreement with Client(s), and Sponsor(s), and other involved parties about what confidential information may need to be disclosed to the appropriate authorities, e.g., illegal activity, required by law, valid court order, or subpoena; and imminent/likely risk of danger to self or to others. Sometimes confidential information must be shared to the appropriate authorities. And sometimes it is requested by a client where they give you permission to share otherwise confidential information. Every case is different, and all aspects should be considered before deciding.

Case Study

Charlotte had been coaching Liam for six months when she received a letter from a lawyer representing Liam. He had been going through an ugly divorce and they had two children together. Charlotte's main clients were divorcees, and she considered this her specialty area.

The letter stated that Liam wanted Charlotte to testify on his behalf that he was an excellent father and a man of great character. His former wife was trying to say that he was a shady businessman and that he was verbally abusive to their two children. Charlotte felt torn because she didn't know him as a father or as a businessman. She could speak about his good character, but she wasn't sure if she wanted to get involved. It felt different with children involved and coming from a verbally abusive home herself, she wasn't sure she wanted to take that chance.

Implications for Coaching

- Confidentiality should be a top priority. However, when someone asks for you to speak on their behalf, it can really depend on the situation. (ICF Code of Ethics, Standards 1.1, 2.1 and 2.3)
- Any kind of abuse may be viewed as a risk to danger to others. You should check with your local laws to see if you would be considered a mandated reporter. (ICF Code of Ethics, Standards 2.1, 2.3, 3.2, 3.4 and 3.5)

Possible Outcomes or Next Steps

- **Open communication.** Since Charlotte is on the fence about this situation, she can be open with her client. She does not know her client in the father role nor as a businessman. Charlotte can decline if she's not comfortable because this is not court ordered or required by law.
- **The importance of professionalism.** Charlotte may need to excuse herself from this favor because of her own personal experiences in a verbally abusive home. Or Charlotte may

need to speak with her client about what his ex-wife is claiming. She also may consider seeking outside opinions of those who know her well to see what they would suggest.

Discussion Points

- What does your agreement say regarding what information is not kept confidential?
- Does it matter if Charlotte cannot remain unbiased? Why or why not?
- If you were Charlotte's coach supervisor, how would you support her?

Reference

ICF Code of Ethics (2025)