Ethics: Whose Story Is It?

Keep this. It's the whole course in writing: the four chapters, the checks that came up, and where it all comes from. The test is open-handout.

Quick thing before you start. Probably a good idea to check your own agency's ethics and boundaries first. Makes sense, right?

H.E.L.P. is a fictional agency. Its rule about participant content on staff personal accounts, its approved contact channels and its reporting routes are story conditions, not Ohio rules. Your own agency's policies and privacy procedures are the ones that count.

How the hour is built

This handout, read through once	**15 min**
The video, four chapters with Cookie and the H.E.L.P. crew	**14 min**
Your call: three practice situations	**6 min**
The test: 15 questions, 12 to pass, open-handout	**15 min**
Course evaluation and certificate	**8 min**
Total designed time	**about 1 hour**

Designed time is the course read and done the way it's laid out. How fast you move through it is up to you.

Chapter 1 · Her story is hers

Babs has been at H.E.L.P. a year. She cares about people and shares her own recovery online. That's her choice. Ohio's ethics code for peer supporters includes sharing our recovery and resiliency stories, and it also requires protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the people we serve. Both belong in the same conversation.

Taco: "I thought being useful meant having a story for everything. Sometimes it helped. Sometimes they were waiting to ask where the meeting was." Later, Taco shares a short story with Ray about asking for help with paperwork. It opens a

conversation and comes back to Ray: "Do you want to figure out where to go first?"

A useful check: after I share, is there more room for the person to talk, or less?

Sharing your experience

- Share something relevant to the person's concern.
- Leave room for the person's experience and their next question.
- Your comfort with sharing doesn't establish somebody else's comfort.

Chapter 2 · The selfie with Ray in it

It's Thursday and Ray is celebrating ninety days. Babs wants a picture and posts it: Ray and Babs under the H.E.L.P. sign, his coin visible, captioned "Ninety days! Proud of this guy." Ray had agreed to a picture. Nobody asked him about publishing it.

Taking a photo and posting it are different decisions. A face, a sign, a coin or a caption can identify someone and suggest something about the services they receive, even without a printed name.

Where the law comes in, in plain language

HIPAA applies in covered settings. Part 2 (42 CFR Part 2) protects certain substance use disorder records connected with covered programs. Neither automatically applies to every recovery conversation everywhere. The agency needs to know which requirements apply. A public post needs the appropriate privacy review and any required written permission. A casual "sure," or routine treatment consent, doesn't settle that.

Photos and publicity

- Permission to take a picture is different from permission to publish it.
- Follow agency policy and the applicable privacy requirements before publishing participant content.
- Explain the proposed use and audience. People need to be able to refuse publicity without losing services. Someone who gets help from you may wonder whether saying no would make things awkward, and that's worth making room for before you ask.

- H.E.L.P.'s rule in the story: no participant content on staff personal accounts. An agency post would go through its own review and permission process.

Ray's mom texts him a screenshot. He hadn't told her he was back in anything. Cookie: "Babs saw a celebration. Ray had a conversation with his mom he wasn't ready to have."

Chapter 3 · The DMs

Amber comments under Babs's personal recovery reel: "It's Amber from H.E.L.P. Can you call me? Having a rough night." Babs sends a private message: "Message me here whenever. I'll keep an eye out."

Public comment	**Private message**	**Approved work channel**
Visible to people who can see the post	Not automatically visible to followers	Checked, and staffed

Private doesn't automatically mean approved for work. At H.E.L.P., personal accounts aren't an approved contact channel. Messages get missed, other staff may have no access, and there are privacy and recordkeeping questions. And "whenever" can sound a lot like a promise.

Val asks what Amber said and whether anyone has connected with her. She asks Babs to check what Amber needs now and to use the contact procedure, and the safety procedure right away if there's an immediate concern. They'll work through the public comment and the messages already exchanged. Don't delete them on your own. Get guidance on what to preserve and how.

Messages and availability

- A public comment and a private message are different things.
- Explain approved contact options, actual hours and after-hours support.
- If an unapproved conversation has started, check the immediate need and follow the contact, safety and record procedures.
- A participant's public disclosure doesn't give staff permission to confirm services or add information.

Taco: "I wanted to be the guy who always answered. Trouble was, I also slept. Occasionally misplaced my phone. Had a life I'd apparently forgotten to mention

when I offered unlimited availability."

> **Before I post or move a work conversation:** Could this identify somebody? · Is this use or channel approved? · What privacy review and permission are needed? · Can we provide the availability I'm offering?
>
> These are prompts to check the requirements. They don't replace them.

Then Babs talks with Amber on the program line: "I should have explained our contact options before inviting you to message my page." Amber says it's a relief. Someone else might feel pushed away. We can listen to that, explain the contact plan and help with access. We don't have to promise a personal channel to show we care.

Chapter 4 · What Tyler does about it

Tyler sees Ray's photo and thinks about the staff group chat: "I could send everybody a screenshot so they know what happened." He pauses: "Which gives everybody another copy of Ray's picture." He closes it and reports the concern promptly through H.E.L.P.'s designated route. The privacy contact may need details through a secure process. The social group chat doesn't.

Privacy incidents and repair

- Report suspected privacy incidents promptly through the designated route. Don't wait for routine supervision while the post stays public.
- Removing a post can limit further exposure. It can't guarantee nobody saved or shared it, and it doesn't finish the incident response.
- Authorized staff use the applicable privacy process to assess what happened and determine required notifications.
- Acknowledge what happened, explain the known actions and hear the person's concerns. Don't promise forgiveness or restored privacy.
- A new request to share, like "tell my mom I'm doing okay," is a new conversation. Clarify what he wants shared and follow the applicable permission process. One update doesn't give permission for every detail or future update.

Tyler to Babs: "I know you were celebrating Ray. It also connected him with services publicly." Babs: "I wish you'd just come to me." Tyler can hear that, and he can be clear about what happened and still remember there's a person sitting

across from him. Taco: "My story might help you feel less alone. That doesn't make your story mine to tell."

Babs can still share her own recovery and follow workplace policy. Ray can keep his private. Caring about somebody includes checking what we're asking them to agree to, what we're promising, and who else might receive their information. We won't catch everything by ourselves, and knowing when to ask for help belongs in this work too.

Where this comes from

1. Ohio Administrative Code 5122-29-15.1, paragraph (N)(4), the code of ethics for certified peer supporters: sharing personal recovery and resiliency stories, dignity, confidentiality, undue influence and unwarranted promises. It doesn't establish H.E.L.P.'s personal-account or contact policies. codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-5122-29-15.1
2. 42 CFR § 2.12, Applicability: the scope of Part 2. It does not automatically cover every recovery conversation or every provider. ecfr.gov
3. 42 CFR § 2.31, Consent requirements: the elements of a written consent (information, recipients, purposes, signature, expiration). A casual agreement isn't a substitute. ecfr.gov
4. HHS, Consent and authorization under HIPAA: routine consent is different from a valid authorization when authorization is required, with limits on conditioning treatment on it. hhs.gov
5. HHS, Breach Notification Rule and the Part 2 Final Rule fact sheet: breach assessment and notification duties. hhs.gov

The scenes in the course (Babs, Ray, Amber, Tyler, Val, Cookie, Taco) are fictional teaching examples at H.E.L.P., a fictional peer support agency. Cookie's and Taco's anecdotes are fictional teaching examples, not accounts of any real person. Whether HIPAA, Part 2 or other requirements apply depends on the organization, the information and the circumstances; ask your designated privacy contact. References checked October 21, 2026. Course version: OPS 003 v3.