

NOT A DOCTOR – VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

For Online Chat Volunteers

1. Welcome to Not a Doctor

Not a Doctor exists to support families facing life-threatening diagnoses with compassion, clarity, and community. Our online chat is often the first safe space someone finds after receiving terrifying or confusing news. Volunteers are the heart of that support.

This handbook gives you everything you need to feel confident, safe, and supported in your role.

2. Our Values

- **Trauma-informed**
- **Family-centred**
- **Non-judgmental**
- **Strength-based**
- **Inclusive and accessible**
- **Collaborative**

These values guide every interaction.

3. Your Role

As an online chat volunteer, you will:

- Provide emotional support
- Listen without judgement
- Validate feelings
- Offer information about support options (not medical advice)
- Signpost to appropriate services
- Escalate safeguarding concerns
- Maintain confidentiality
- Look after your own wellbeing

You are *not* expected to fix problems, diagnose, or give clinical guidance.

4. What Families May Be Experiencing

Families may come to us feeling:

- Shock
- Fear
- Anger
- Exhaustion
- Confusion
- Grief
- Loneliness
- Overwhelm

Your calm presence can make a profound difference.

5. Trauma-Informed Communication

Use:

- Validation
- Grounding
- Choice
- Collaboration
- Empowerment
- Clear boundaries

Avoid:

- Minimising
- Giving advice
- Making assumptions
- Over-reassurance
- “Fixing”

(See the cheat sheet for examples.)

6. Using the Online Chat Platform

You will be trained on:

- Logging in and setting availability
- Accepting chats
- Using templates and shortcuts
- Writing notes
- Closing chats safely
- Managing technical issues
- Protecting data and confidentiality

If anything feels unclear, supervisors are always available.

7. Safeguarding & Escalation

You must escalate if someone:

- Mentions harm to themselves or others
- Discloses domestic abuse
- Mentions a child at risk
- Describes a medical emergency
- Appears unable to keep themselves safe

Your role is to **notice and escalate**, not to intervene directly.

You will be given:

- A safeguarding flowchart
- Escalation contacts
- A step-by-step guide for urgent situations

8. Boundaries

Volunteers must not:

- Give medical advice
- Interpret test results
- Offer personal opinions
- Share personal contact details
- Promise outcomes
- Continue a chat if they feel unsafe or overwhelmed

Boundaries protect you *and* the families.

9. Looking After Yourself

Supporting people in crisis can be emotionally demanding.

We encourage:

- Breaks between chats
- Debriefing with supervisors

- Peer support
- Noticing your own emotional limits
- Logging off if you feel overwhelmed

Your wellbeing matters as much as the families’.

10. Supervision & Support

You will have access to:

- A named supervisor
- Regular check-ins
- Optional reflective practice sessions
- A volunteer community space
- Ongoing training

You are never expected to manage difficult situations alone.

11. Starting Your First Shifts

Your onboarding pathway:

1. Training day
2. Shadowing an experienced volunteer
3. Supported practice chats
4. Sign-off
5. Independent shifts with supervision available

We will never put you into a chat before you feel ready.

12. Code of Conduct

Volunteers must:

- Treat everyone with dignity
- Maintain confidentiality
- Uphold boundaries
- Use trauma-informed communication
- Follow safeguarding procedures
- Represent Not a Doctor professionally
- Ask for help when needed

13. Ending Chats Safely

A good ending includes:

- Validation
- Encouragement
- Clear closure
- Invitation to return

Example:

“Thank you for sharing this with me today. You’ve handled so much. Please take care of yourself after this chat, and you’re welcome back any time.”

14. Final Message

You are joining a community built on compassion, courage, and humanity. The families who come to us are facing some of the hardest moments of their lives. Your presence, your listening, and your kindness will matter more than you may ever know.

We’re grateful to have you with us.

NotA Doctor