

Conflict of Interest Policy for The Autism Community in Action (TACA) Program Volunteers

Introduction:

At The Autism Community in Action (TACA), our goal is to educate and support families affected by autism spectrum disorders (ASD). To uphold the integrity of our Programs and ensure the best interests of both our organization and the families we serve, all volunteers must adhere to the following Conflict of Interest Policy.

Definition of Conflict of Interest:

A conflict of interest arises when a volunteer's personal interests or relationships could influence their ability to act impartially in the best interest of TACA and the families we serve. Volunteers should prioritize the best interests of the individuals TACA serves without a competing agenda, focusing on educational development and the personal choice of the family. Support from volunteers should not be influenced by personal gain, professional relationships, or sponsorships.

Examples of Conflict of Interest:

1. **Financial Relationships:** A volunteer has a financial interest in a company or organization that provides autism-related services or products. For example, a volunteer who owns a therapy center may be inclined to recommend their services over other options, or a volunteer who sells a product may promote their product to families they support. This would include volunteers who receive benefits from making recommendations or gathering followers.
2. **Personal Relationships:** A volunteer has a close personal relationship with a member of the organization, a sponsor/partner of the organization, or a family receiving services from TACA, which could compromise their ability to maintain confidentiality or provide unbiased support. For example, a volunteer who has a personal relationship with a sponsor may unduly promote them to families seeking support.
3. **Professional Relationships:** A volunteer holds a position in another organization or institution that may compete with or have conflicting interests with TACA. This includes volunteering for a competing autism advocacy group or using TACA's platform to promote external organizations or personal endeavors, such as health/life coaching or influencer pages. Licensed professionals may be refused participation in volunteer roles as their professional advice presents legal and ethical issues and conflicts with the interests of the program to develop and support parents in becoming informed consumers and advocates.

Policy Guidelines:

1. **Disclosure:** Volunteers must disclose any potential conflicts of interest to TACA leadership, including financial interests, personal relationships, or professional affiliations that may impact their volunteer duties. Disclosure should be made during the application process, immediately after any change in circumstance, and before engaging in any volunteer activity.
2. **Recusal:** Volunteers with a conflict of interest must recuse themselves from any decision-making processes, activities, and support interactions with TACA constituents where their impartiality may be compromised.
3. **Transparency:** TACA will maintain transparency regarding potential conflicts of interest among volunteers and take appropriate measures to address and mitigate any conflicts.
4. **Education and Support:** TACA will provide resources and guidance to help families make informed decisions about their children's care and support volunteers in aligning their actions with TACA's values and mission.
5. **Code of Conduct:** Volunteers are expected to adhere to TACA's code of conduct, acting with honesty, and integrity, and in the best interest of the organization and the families we serve.
6. **Agreement:** Volunteers must update their Conflict-of-Interest Disclosure annually. Based on the disclosure, coaching, recusal, or limitations may be placed on their volunteer activities.

Conflict of Interest Vocations:

1. **Life Coaches:** Individuals who provide life coaching services will not be approved to become TACA Mentors to ensure the Mentor Program remains unbiased and solely focused on the best interests of the families we serve.
2. **Social Media Influencers, Brand Ambassadors, Affiliates:** These individuals must adhere to additional guidelines to prevent conflicts of interest:
 - a. **Separation of Roles:** Clearly separate mentoring activities from promotional activities. Do not use the TACA Mentor role to promote or endorse any products, services, or brands.
 - b. **Prohibited Activities:** Refrain from promoting affiliated brands, sharing personal social media handles or business pages, and using TACA's platform to gain followers or customers.

TACA will monitor compliance with these guidelines and address any violations, which may result in removal from the mentor role to uphold the program's integrity.



Conclusion:

By adhering to this Conflict-of-Interest Policy, TACA volunteers demonstrate their commitment to upholding the organization's values and ensuring that our programs and services remain focused on supporting families affected by autism spectrum disorders.