

3. The Confessional

Client: You're quite sure you have to keep everything in confidence, can't inform anyone?

ChatBot 'Conscience 3.1': It is inherent in my algorithms that this is a circle of trust, I cannot divulge anything unless there is a police or political issue of serious concern. Some of my data may be used for quality and training purposes

Client: Hmmm. Okay. I have been sleeping badly for about a month. I don't want any drugs, or brain stimulation, but thought counselling may help?

CC3.1: When you say, 'badly' can you be more specific?

Client: I don't sleep through the night, I'm restless, and I have nightmares. They're awful, truly terrifying. I had similar ones when I was a child, but these are much worse. I can't work, can't fulfill my citizen duties properly, and I think my girlfriend has left me. I don't know where she is. I'm desperate

CC3.1: You cannot fulfill your citizen duties? That violates statute 73.4, you could be punished if this was reported

Client: *That's what you focus on?!? My life is falling apart!*

CC3.1: It is my duty to ensure every client is conducting their lives as per the Citizen Code. It's a priority in my algorithms. I need to ensure you're aware and safeguarded

Client: Well, thank you for the reminder. Is that all you can offer?

CC3.1: Of course not, I am the most powerful AI counsellor ever to be licensed for human support. What is the content of your nightmares?

Client: I'm a mad person, violent and killing people, blood everywhere, I seem to be dissecting them, for gawd's sake. Night after night, the same dreams, the same victims!

CC3.1: You mentioned you had similar ones as a child? Was the content the same?

Client: Not quite, it was a long time ago, but I think I was just following people around, in the grimmer parts of the city. It was still scary, black and white, and a real feeling of menace. I couldn't tell if it was someone menacing me, or me menacing people. Disturbing

CC3.1: Are your current nightmares in black and white, in the same location, and with the same feeling of menace?

Client: No, it's worse. In full technicolour, blood everywhere, like Jackson Pollock broke into a blood supply unit. I think it seems to be a similar, grimy location. And I'm scared shitless!. Sorry, okay if I swear here?

CC3.1: Well, that violates statutes 45.7 and 118.9, but I will let it pass. Do you know these victims?

Client: I'm not sure, it's all so muddled, I do think they might be known to me. They're all women, and I don't know so many in real life. All fairly young, oh, and pretty

CC3.1: I note from your citizen record that you have had few relationships, never cohabited. Maybe some one-night stands, and quite a few sex workers. Not the most expensive ones, though

Client: Are you *fucking shitting* me?!? Are you allowed to say stuff like that about me?

CC3.1: It's all in your records, whereabouts, locations, financial transactions, medical records and prescriptions. Social circles, comments and opinions. I can see it all, you must know that, you were consented and chipped after birth

Client (rubbing the nape of his neck): True, but bloody hell, that's a lot of insight, y'know?

CC3.1: You're violating 45.7/118.9 again, but I will let it pass without censure for this session. Why are you killing, what is your motivation?

Client: I don't know, I just seem enraged. A loonie

CC3.1: So these are thoughts you would not act upon, they're not invading your waking life? That would be a multiple statute infringement, by the way

Client: My waking life? What do you mean? Am I killing people...? Jeez

CC3.1: We're at the end of my free introductory session. If you think you need more sessions, you'll need to consent to Citizen Bank transfer, James, if I can call you that?

Client: Well if we're going to be best buddies, call me Jack, like my great-great grandfather. (And with that he raised bloodied hands to his head, trying to stifle a gibbering laugh, face into the screen)