**Electronics Communications Policy**

The use of various types of Electronic Communications is increasingly common in our society, and many individuals believe this is a preferred method of communicating with others, whether the relationships are social or professional. However, many of these, common modes of communication put your privacy at risk and can be inconsistent with the laws and standards of my profession. Consequently, my Electronic Communications policy has been prepared to assure that the security and confidentiality of your treatment, and to assure that is consistent with professional ethics and the law.

In order to maintain clarity regarding our use of electronic modes of communication during your treatment, I have prepared this document outlining my office policies related to the use of text messaging, Email, and social media. Reviewing this **Electronic Communications Policy** will help you to understand how I conduct myself with electronic media as a mental health professional, as well as how you can expect me to respond to various interactions that may occur between us.

As new technology develops and the technology changes, there may be times when I need to update this policy. I will notify you in writing of any policy changes and provide you with a copy of the updated Electronic Communications policy upon request. The most current PDF last version of this policy document is located in its entirety at [www.hopeandbalance.org](http://www.hopeandbalance.org) It is important that we are able to communicate and also keep the confidential space that is vital to therapy, please speak with me about any concerns you have regarding my preferred communication methods.

**Non-Secure Electronic Communication Overview**

While it may seem convenient during the course of treatment to communicate by email, text message or other electronic messaging, be advised that these methods, in their typical form are not a confidential means of communication. Therefore, I do not use Email communication with my patients. I may use text messaging, but it is generally for administrative purposes only. If you choose to use these methods to communicate with me, there is reasonable chance that a third party may be able to intercept and eavesdrop on these messages include, but are not limited to:

People in your home or other environment, who can access your phone, computer, or other devices that you use to read and write messages. Your employer, if you use your work e-mail, computer, tablet or device to communicate with me. Third parties such as server administrators or others who monitor intranet. If you wish to communicate with me via text message, please read and complete the optional consent form included at the end of this official pocket. Unless you have completed the consent for transmission of protecting health information by non-secure means for me, I will not respond to electronic communications/text messages. If there are people in your life that you do not want to access these communications, please talk to me about ways to keep your communications safe and confidential.

**Email Communications**

In general, Email is an unsecure form of communication. All Federal law requires all e-mail to be protected from unauthorized use and disclosure. Not all the mail servers are HIPPA compliant. That means that all email exchanges may not be guarded and information that may be retained, could be communications between you and me. While it may be unlikely that someone will be looking at these, as long as they are, in theory they are available to be read by the system administrator of the Internet service provider. As a practice I do not email with my clients for many clinical and privacy reasons.

**Text Messages**

Because text messaging is a very unsecure and impersonal type of communication, I do not send clinical information via a text message and when I receive a text from a client I generally only respond minimally to them with administrative information such as appointment times. Otherwise, I will respond via phone. If you are in crisis or it is urgent please call me, call the crisis hotline, or go to the nearest emergency room.

**Third-Party Access to Communications**

Please know that when you use electronic communication methods, such as e-mail, texting, online video, etc., there are various technicians and administrators who maintain these services and who may conceivably have access to the content of those communications. Of special consideration are use of work devices. **If you use your work device to communicate with me, your employer may have access your electronic communications.** There may be similar issues involved with school or other organizations that you may be affiliated with. Additionally, people with access to your computer, mobile phone, and/or other devices may also have access to your electronic communication and text messages. Please, take a moment to contemplate the risks involved if any these persons were to access the messages that we exchange with each other.

**Social Media**

I do not communicate with, or contact, any of my clients through social media or networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. In addition, if discover that I have accidentally established an online relationship with you, I will cancel that relationship. This is because these types of casual social contacts can create significant security risks for you.

I do participate when various Social Media Networks for personal and marketing purposes, but not in my professional capacity as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. If you have an online presence, there is a possibility that you may encounter me by accident. If this occurs, please discuss it with me during our next session. I have researched this issue in depth, and it is my conclusion that any social media communications with my clients have a high potential to compromise the professional relationship. In addition, please do not try to contact me into this way – I will not respond and will terminate any online contact no matter how accidental.

**Friending**

I do not accept friend or contact requests from current or former clients on social media or networking sites. I believe that adding clients as social networking contacts may not only compromise client confidentiality and our respective privacy, but also blur boundaries in our professional relationship. If you have any questions about this policy, please bring them up to me, and we can talk more about it.

**Following**

I do publish some news on my website. I use social media for my personal and professional life and only follow other health professionals and informational and new sources on my social media accounts for my private practice. In addition, viewing client’s online activities without their consent, and without our explicit arrangement towards a specific purpose, could potentially have a negative influence on the working relationship. If there are things from your online life that you wish to share with me, please bring that into our sessions where we can view and explore them together, during the therapy hour.

**Interacting**

Please do not use messaging on social media networking sites to contact me. These sites are not very secure, and I may not read these messages in a timely fashion. Do not use wall postings, @replies, or other means of engaging with me in public online if we have a and established client/therapist relationship. Engaging with me in these ways can compromise your privacy and may also create a possibility that the exchanges will need to be documented and archived in my client records becoming a part of your legal, medical record.

**Websites**

I have a website that you are free to access. I use it for professional reasons to provide information to others about me and my practice. You are welcome to access and review the information that I have on my website and, if you have questions about it, we should discuss this during your therapy sessions.

**Web searches**

I will not use web searches to gather information about you without your permission. I believe that this violates your privacy rights; however, I understand that you might choose to gather information about me in this way. In this day and age, there exists an incredible amount of information available about individuals on the Internet, much of which may have actually been known to that person and some of which may be completely inaccurate or unknown. If you encounter any information about me through web searches or any other fashion for that matter, please discuss this with me during our time together so that we can discuss the information and its potential impact on your treatment.

Although it is not a regular part of my practice to search for clients on Google, Facebook, or other Internet search engines, exceptions may be made during times of crisis. If I have reason to suspect that you are in danger or are in danger of harming another, and you have not been in touch with me via our usual means (coming to appointments, phone calls, or texts), it is possible that I might use a search for you to on the Internet (to find you, to find someone close to you, or to check on your recent status updates) as necessary part of ensuring your welfare. All these are unusual situations and, if I am relegated to using such means of gathering information, I will fully document and discuss the event with you in person as early as it is feasible. This follows the NASW ethical principle of informed consent in the NASW code of ethics section 1.03 (i).

**Business and Review Sites**

Recently it has become fashionable for clients to review their health care providers on various web sites. You may find my therapy practice on various sites such as Healthgrades, Google, or other such places that list of businesses. Some of these sites include areas in which users to rate their providers and add reviews. Many of these sites comb search engines for business listings that are automatically added to their listings regardless of whether the business has added itself to the sides. Ethical principle 1.06 (b) of the NASW Code of Ethics on Conflicts of Interest states, “Social workers should not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship or exploit others to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.” Please know **that my listing is not a request for a testimonial, rating, or endorsement** from you as my current or former client.Please do not rate or review my work with you on any of these web sites while you are still in treatment. Doing so has a significant potential to damage our ability to work together and jeopardize your own privacy.Unfortunately, **because of confidentiality restrictions, mental health professionals cannot not respond to such reviews, comments, and related errors.** If you encounter such reviews of me, or any professional you are working with, please share it with me so we can discuss it and its potential impact on your therapy.

You have a right to express yourself on any site you wish but, to ensure your confidentiality, I cannot respond to any review, positive or negative, on any of these sites. I urge you to take your own privacy as seriously as I take my commitment to your confidentiality. Also, please be aware that if you use social media sites to communicate indirectly with me about your feelings about our work and/or relationship, there is a good possibility I will never receive your message. **If we are working together, I expect that you will directly bring your feelings about our work into the therapy process. This is an important part of therapy, even if you decide that we’re not a good fit.**

None of this is meant to keep you from sharing that you are in therapy with me wherever and with whomever you like. Confidentiality means that I cannot tell people that you are my client and my ethics code prohibits me from requesting testimonials, but you are free to tell anyone you wish that I am your therapist or how you feel about the treatment that I have provided to you and by any means of your choosing. If you choose to write something or did a business review site, please keep in mind that you may be sharing personally revealing information in a public forum. I encourage you to create a pseudonym that is not related to your regular e-mail address to social networks, for your own privacy and protection. If you feel I have done something harmful or unethical, and you do not feel comfortable discussing it with me you can always contact the appropriate state regulatory body.

**RSS and News Readers**

I do not follow current or former clients via RSS feeds or news readers. If there are things you want to share with me, that you feel are relevant to your treatment, whether they are news items or things you have created, I encourage you to bring these items of interest into our sessions.

**Location Based Services**

If you use location-based services (LBS) on a mobile phone or device, please be aware of privacy issues related to using these services, including apps and sites such as Facebook, Google, Instagram, Snapchat etc. If you have a GPS tracking enabled on your device, it is possible that others may surmise that you are a client due to the intentional or passive check-ins at my office. Please be aware of this risk if you are intentionally “checking in” at my office, or if you have a passive LBS application and enabled on your device.

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Client Signature Date Clinician Signature Date

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Client name printed Clinician Name Printed