

MN COUNSELING AND THERAPY CENTER

Erin Shobe, M.A., LMFT, RPT-S
Molly Nepote, M.A., LAMFT
Melissa Tyler, M.A., LMFT
Alison Yang, B.A., MFT Intern

Electronic Resources and Social Media Policy

This document outlines my MN Counseling and Therapy Center's policies related to use of Electronic Resources and Social Media. Please read it to understand how we, Erin Shobe, M.A., LMFT, RPT-S, Molly Nepote, M.A., LAMFT, Melissa Tyler, M.A., LMFT, and Alison Yang, B.A., MFT Intern, conduct ourselves on the Internet as mental health professionals and how you can expect us to respond to various interactions that may occur between us on the Internet.

Overall, we see Social Media as tool to develop and maintain connection to past, present and future members of our community and extend the reach of our therapeutic work in our community. If you have any questions about anything within this document, we encourage you to bring them up when we meet. As new technology develops and the Internet changes, there may be times when we need to update this policy. If we do so, we will offer a printed copy of the updated policy and you can view it via the Client Portal on simplepractice.com.

Some of the relevant ethical codes to consider in our social media policy considered here state:

- Marriage and Family Therapists do not disclose client confidences except by written authorization or waiver, or where mandated or permitted by law.
- Verbal authorization will not be sufficient except in emergency situations, unless prohibited by law.
- When providing couple, family or group treatment, the therapist does not disclose information outside the treatment context without a written authorization from each individual competent to execute a waiver.
- In the context of couple, family or group treatment, the therapist may not reveal any individual's confidences to others in the client unit without the prior written permission of that individual.
- Marriage and Family Therapists are aware of their influential positions with respect to clients, and they avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of such persons. Therapists, therefore, make every effort to avoid conditions and multiple relationships with clients that could impair professional judgment or increase the risk of exploitation. Such relationships include, but are not limited to, business or close personal relationships with a client or the client's immediate family. When the risk of impairment or exploitation exists due to conditions or multiple roles, therapists take appropriate precautions.

E-mails, Cell Phones, Computers and Faxes are Not Private: No form of client communication is 100 percent guaranteed to be private. Conversations can be overheard; e-mails can be sent to the wrong recipients and phone conversations can be listened to by others. But in today's age of e-mail, Facebook, Twitter and other social media, therapists must be more aware than ever of the ethical pitfalls they can fall into by using these types of communication. Although they add convenience and expedite communication, it is very important to be aware that computers and email and cell phone communication can be accessed relatively easily by

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unauthorized people and hence can compromise the privacy and confidentiality of such communication. E-mails are vulnerable to such unauthorized access since servers have unlimited and direct access to all e-mails that go through them. Although we are exploring various encryption software programs to protect your privacy, our e-mails and data on our computers may not be encrypted, it is always a possibility that faxes can be sent erroneously to the wrong address, and computers, including laptops, may be stolen. Our computers are equipped with a firewall, virus protection and passwords, and we also password-protect and back up all confidential information from our computers (stored off-site) on a regular basis.

Electronic Resources are Used for Health Records and Billing Purposes: All these programs are HIPAA compliant and highly secure, and although every effort is made to protect your privacy, there is always a chance of human error or security breaches. These programs provide email and/or text appointment reminders. If you provide an email address or mobile phone number these may be implemented, however you can opt out of these services by notifying your provider.

If you need to cancel or change an appointment time; a telephone call or SMS (text) may get the message to us in a timely manner. Please notify us if you decide to avoid or limit, in any way, the use of e-mails, cell phones SMS (text), faxes, or storage of confidential information on computers. **If you communicate confidential or private information via SMS (text) or e-mail, we will assume that you have made an informed decision,** will view it as your agreement to take the risk that such communication may be intercepted, and I will honor your desire to communicate on such matters via e-mail. Please do not use e-mail or faxes for emergencies. Due to computer or network problems, e-mails may not be deliverable, and I may not check my e-mails or faxes daily.

We prefer to use e-mail to arrange or modify appointments, only. If you e-mail us content related to your therapy sessions, please note that as e-mail is not completely secure or confidential. **If e-mail communication outside of therapy requires more than 5 minutes to read and respond to, we may charge for my professional services rendered in 15 minute increments. Please indicate if you intend to pay these charges, or we will save it for review during your appointment time.**

If you choose to communicate with us by e-mail, be aware that all e-mails are retained in the logs of your and our Internet service providers. While it is unlikely that someone will be looking at these logs, they are, in theory, available to be read by the system administrator(s) of the Internet service provider. You should also know that any e-mails we receive from you and any responses that we send to you become a part of your legal record and may be revealed in cases where your records are summoned by a legal entity.

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Social Media Should be Considered Public Communication: Messaging on Social Networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn is not secure. It could compromise your confidentiality to use Wall postings, @replies, or other means of engaging with us online if we have an already established client/therapist relationship. It may also create the possibility that these exchanges become a part of your legal medical record and will need to be documented and archived in your chart. We may not read these messages in a timely fashion. If you need to contact us between sessions, the best way to do so is by phone (612) 849-4792. Or direct e-mail at admin@minnesota-therapy.com is second best for quick, administrative issues such as changing appointment times. See the e-mail section above for more information regarding e-mail interactions.

Friending May Expose Our Professional Relationship and May Undermine Your Privacy: This social network policy serves as your notification that being linked as friends or contacts on these sites can compromise your confidentiality and our respective privacy. As in any other public context, you have control over your own description of the nature of our acquaintance, if you choose to disclose a professional relationship. For example, if we saw you at church or school and you ignored us, we would follow your lead and do the same. If you introduce us to your friends we would agree with your description of how you know us. We will not confirm nor deny any professional relationship between ourselves and clients on any social network sites. We reserve the right to discontinue any social network connection without prior notification, and we encourage you to do the same. We discourage the use of social network sites for any communication about our therapeutic relationship, including scheduling issues, due to the lack of privacy protections.

In addition, viewing your online activities without your consent and without our explicit arrangement towards a specific purpose could potentially have a negative influence on our working relationship. If there are things from your online life that you wish to share with us, please bring them into our sessions where we can view and explore them together, during the therapy hour. Our current treatment agreement states that we keep patient information private and do not share it with others unless there is reason to believe that the patient or another individual is at risk. It is easy to forget that when we type names into a search engine or a field on a social network, we are also sharing information with others. If you have questions about this, please bring them up when we meet and we can talk more about it.

Location-Based Services Reveal Your Location: If you use location-based services on your mobile phone, you may wish to be aware of the privacy issues related to using these services. If you have GPS tracking enabled on your device, it is possible that others may surmise that you are a therapy client due to regular check-ins at our office on a weekly basis. Please be aware of this risk if you are intentionally “checking in” from my office or if you have a passive LBS app enabled on your phone.

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We Do Not Use Search Engines to Learn About You: It is NOT a regular part of our practice to search for clients on Google or Facebook or other search engines. Extremely rare exceptions *may* be made during times of crisis. If we have a reason to suspect that you are in danger and you have not been in touch with us via our usual means (coming to appointments, phone, or email) there *might* be an instance in which using a search engine (to find you, find someone close to you, or to check on your recent status updates) becomes necessary as part of ensuring your welfare. These are unusual situations and if we ever resort to such means, we will fully document it and discuss it with you when we next meet.

Fanning/Liking My Professional Page May Imply Endorsement:

We keep a Facebook Page for our professional practice to allow people to share posts and practice updates with other Facebook users. You are welcome to view our Facebook Page and read or share articles posted there, and comment on them. However, referrals from other clients are one of our best sources of business. Our website and Facebook Fan page are intended to let others know who we are as professionals and to make it easy to refer those you feel would benefit from our services. We will not confirm nor deny any professional relationship between clients on any social network site. This social media policy was constructed to inform you of the risks involved with associating on a social network. American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Ethics Code states Marriage and family therapists do not use their professional relationships with clients to further their own interests. We will not ask you to “like” our page or endorse us on other business pages. Please note that you should be able to subscribe to the page via RSS without becoming a Fan and without creating a visible, public link to our Page. You are more than welcome to do this.

Tweeting and Following Promote Our Professional Services:

We periodically publish a blog on my website and may post news about services offered in our practice, such as upcoming workshops and presentations, on Twitter. We have no expectation that you as a client will want to follow our Twitter stream. However, if you use an easily recognizable name on Twitter and we happen to notice that you’ve followed us there, we may briefly discuss it and its potential impact on our working relationship. Our primary concern is your privacy. If you share this concern, there are more private ways to follow us on Twitter (such as using an RSS feed or a locked Twitter list), which would eliminate your having a public link to our content. Please use your own discretion in choosing whether to follow us.

Casual viewing of clients’ online content outside of the therapy hour can create confusion regarding whether it’s being done as a part of your treatment. In addition, viewing your online activities without your consent or without our explicit arrangement towards a specific purpose could potentially influence our working relationship. If there are things from your online life that you wish to share with us, please bring them into our sessions where we can view and explore them together, during the therapy hour.

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Business Review Sites are Ineffective Place to Voice Your Complaints:

You may find our practice on sites such as Yelp, Healthgrades, Yahoo Local, Bing, or other places which list businesses. Some of these sites include forums in which users rate their providers and add reviews. Many of these sites comb search engines for business listings and automatically add listings regardless of whether the business has added itself to the site. If you should find our listing on any of these sites, please know that our listing is NOT a request for a testimonial, rating, or endorsement from you as our client. Of course, you have a right to express yourself on any site you wish. But due to confidentiality, we cannot respond to any review on any of these sites whether it is positive or negative. We urge you to take your own privacy as seriously as we take our commitment of confidentiality to you. You should also be aware that if you are using these sites to communicate indirectly with us about your feelings about our work, there is a good possibility that we may never see it.

If we are working together, we hope that you will bring your feelings and reactions to our work directly into the therapy process. This can be an important part of therapy, even if you decide we are not a good fit. None of this is meant to keep you from sharing that you are in therapy with us wherever and with whomever you like. In addition, we have a Feedback form on our website that allows you to provide anonymous feedback through SurveyMonkey. This is administered so you can provide feedback privately. Confidentiality means that we cannot tell people that you are our client and our Ethics Code prohibits us from requesting testimonials. But you are more than welcome to tell anyone you wish that we are your therapists or how you feel about the treatment we provided to you, in any forum of your choosing.

If you do choose to write something on a business review site, we hope you will keep in mind that you may be sharing personally revealing information in a public forum. We urge you to create a pseudonym that is not linked to your regular e-mail address or friend networks for your own privacy and protection.

Conclusion:

Thank you for taking the time to review our Social Media Policy. If you have questions or concerns about any of these policies and procedures or regarding our potential interactions on the Internet, do bring them to our attention so that we can discuss them.

Acknowledgement of Review of Social Media Policy

By signing below I am indicating that I have read this document, understand my rights as a client, and accept the responsibility as stated. I have been offered a printed copy of the Social Media Policy and all questions regarding these policies have been answered to my satisfaction.

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Signature_____ Date_____

Signature of Parent/Guardian_____ Date_____