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Social Media Policy

This document outlines my office policies related to the use of social media. Please read it to understand how I conduct myself on the internet as a mental health professional and how you can expect me to respond to various interactions that may occur between us online.

If you have any questions about anything within this document, I encourage you to bring them up when we meet. As new technology develops and the internet changes, there may be times when I need to update this policy. If I do so, I will notify you in writing of any policy changes and make sure you have a copy of the updated policy.

Friending

I do not accept friend or contact requests from current or former clients on any social networking site (Facebook, LinkedIn, Google Plus). I believe that adding clients as friends or contacts on these sites can compromise your confidentiality and our respective privacy. It may also blur the boundaries of our therapeutic relationship. If you have questions about this, please bring them up when we meet and we can talk more about it.

Following

I keep a Facebook page ([facebook.com/TheIntimacyDr](https://www.facebook.com/TheIntimacyDr)) and Twitter account (@TheIntimacyDr) for my professional practice to allow people to share my posts and practice updates with other Facebook users. I have no expectation that you as a client will want to follow either of these pages. All my posts are open and these pages can be read without formally following either account. Please keep in mind that following either account and/or posting responses creates a likelihood of compromised client confidentiality.

My primary concern is your privacy. If you share this concern, there are more private ways to follow me (such as using an RSS feed or a locked Twitter list), which would eliminate your having a public link to my content. You are welcome to use your own discretion in choosing when and how to follow me, if you are interested in doing so.

Note that I will not follow you back. I only follow other mental health professionals (as well as my family and friends) on Twitter and do not follow current or former clients on any social media site. My reasoning is that I believe casual viewing of my clients' online content outside of the therapy hour can create confusion in regard to whether it's being done as part of your treatment or to satisfy my personal curiosity. 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 relationships. If there are online things from your online life that you wish to share with me, please bring them into our sessions where we can view and explore them together, during the therapy hour.

Interacting

Please do not use messaging on Social Networking sites such as Twitter, LinkedIn, or Facebook to contact me. These sites are not secure and I may not read these messages in a timely fashion (and often do not get notification at all from the site that they have been sent). Do not use wall postings, @replies, or other means of engaging with

me in public online if we have already established a client/therapist relationship. Engaging with me in this way could compromise your confidentiality. 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.

Please do not use SMS (mobile text messaging) unless we have already determined the parameters of this, and you have signed a contact form acknowledging that texting is not HIPAA compliant. As a general rule, texting is only appropriate for confirming appointments, letting me know you are running late, etc., and not appropriate for lengthy conversations about your treatment needs.

If you need to contact me between sessions, the best way to do so is by phone. Direct email at info@faithgharper.com is second best for quick, administrative issues such as changing appointment times. See the email section for more information. Please remember that my phone is typically not answered after hours, unless we have agreed that I would do so. I am also not an emergency services provider, so please call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room in the event of an emergency.

Use of Search Engines

It is not a regular part of my practice to search for clients on Google, Facebook, or any other web search engine or social media site. Extremely rare exceptions may be made during times of crisis. If I have a reason to suspect that you are in danger and you have not been in touch with me 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 check on your recent status updates) becomes necessary as part of ensuring your welfare. These are unusual situations and if I ever resort to such means, I will fully document it and discuss it with you when we next meet.

Business Review Sites

You may find my 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. Please be aware that I do not add myself to these sites, therefore this will be the case if you see me listed. Please also know that my listing is not a request for a testimonial, rating, or endorsement from you as my client. While I often am sent clients through referrals from other practitioners and current or former clients, I do not ever seek public testimonials in regards to my services. Again, this is to protect your privacy. Nor do I want you to feel pressured to recommend me in any regard for my professional services. Of course you have the right to express yourself on any site you wish. But due to confidentiality, I cannot respond to any review on any of these sites whether it is positive or negative. I urge you to take your own privacy as seriously as I take my commitment of confidentiality to you. Remember that even web content that is deleted is still archived for review and can be accessed by others. Including your friends, loved ones, and employers. You should also be aware that if you are using these sites to communicate indirectly with me about your feelings about our work, there is a good possibility that I may never see it. My hope is that you will feel comfortable enough with me to share any concerns you may have directly with me, so we can work to resolve them together, whenever possible.

Remember that confidentiality means I cannot tell people you are my client, without your informed consent. You are more than welcome to tell anyone that I am your therapist or how you feel about treatment I have provided to you, in any forum of your choosing.

If you do choose to write something on a business review site, I hope you will keep in mind that you may be sharing personally revealing information in a public forum that will be archived even if deleted. I urge you to create a pseudonym that is not linked to your regular email address or friend 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 also communicate directly with my licensing agency at:

**Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors
Complaints Management and Investigative Section
P.O. Box 141369
Austin, Texas 78714-1369
https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/counselor/lpc_complaint.shtm**

or call 1-800-942-5540 to request the appropriate form or obtain more information.

Location-Based Services

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. I do not place my practice as a check in location on various sites such as Foursquare, Gowalla, Loopt, etc. However, 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 my office. 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.

Email

I prefer using email only to arrange or modify appointments. Please do not email me content related to your therapy sessions, as email is not completely secure or confidential. If you choose to communicate with me by email, be aware that all emails are retained in the logs of your and my Internet service providers, and not all providers use encrypted servers. 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 emails I receive from you and any responses that I send to you become a part of your legal record.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to review my social media policy. If you have any questions or concerns about any of these policies and procedures regarding our potential interactions on the internet, do bring them to my attention so we can discuss them.

I will provide you with a form to sign stating that you have read and understand my social media policy. Any changes I make to this policy will be provided to you, with the opportunity to sign an updated agreement regarding those changes.

(Policy adapted from Dr. Keely Kolmes [drkkolmes.com] with permission.)