

## **Counselling Online & Social Media Policy**

**Introduction** - This document outlines policies related to use of Counselling Online & Social Media. It will provide an understanding how I conduct myself on the Internet as a Counselling professional and how I may respond to interactions which may occur between us on the Internet.

Befriending - I cannot accept friend or contact requests from current or former clients, this includes visual or non-visual links on any social networking sites like (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok etc). I cannot follow current or former clients or view your online activities without your consent and without our explicit arrangement towards a specific purpose. This can blur boundaries of the therapeutic relationship and compromise confidentiality and privacy. It is best practice to bring your online life to share with me into our counselling sessions where we can view and explore them together, during therapy.

Interacting Boundaries - I understand there may be times when contact between us is necessary outside of our booked session time. The best way is by email, limiting emails to making, changing, or cancelling an appointment unless by prior arrangement. I check my emails regularly, I am not always able to respond straight away, however I will reply at the most convenient time. I cannot respond through Whatsapp, Telegram or Signal etc or messaging on Social Networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn, Wall postings, @replies, # hastags as these sites are not secure and are in the public domain, yet I can on rare occasion respond to text messages for example if you are running late to a session.

Use of Search Engines - It is not part of my practice to search for clients on Google or Facebook or other search engines, exceptions may be made during times of crisis for instance; I have a reason to suspect that you are in danger, you have not been in contact with regards to coming to appointments, emailing or telephoning. A search engine to find you, find someone close to you, check your status updates may become necessary as part of ensuring your welfare. These are extremely rare occasions and will be fully recorded and discussed with you once we next meet.

Google Reader - I do not follow current or former clients on Google Reader and/or share articles.

Business Review Sites - Due to confidentiality, I cannot respond to any reviews on any sites, if I am named. If you choose to write something on a business review site, for your own privacy and protection you may wish to consider using a pseudonym profile or name not linked to your regular email address or friends' networks as you will be sharing information on a public domain.

Location-Based Services face-to-face Counselling - 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 become aware you are a therapy client due to regular check-ins at the location on a weekly basis. Please be aware of this if you are intentionally "checking in," from a counselling location or if you have a passive LBS (Location Base Services) app enabled on your phone.

Email - I use a web-based mail which has end to end encryption on both ends. I use email only to arrange, modify or share documents for appointments. As email's are not completely secure or confidential, email communications are retained in logs of your and my Internet service provider, in theory, this means they are available to be read by the system administrator(s) of the Internet service provider, for this reason it is best not to email personal content related to your therapy sessions. Any emails and/or correspondence I receive from you and any responses that I send to you become a part of your legal record.

Online Sessions - Microsoft Teams - I use the 'Teams' video conferencing app for online sessions. It is important when engaging with your therapy sessions using Teams to find a place that is safe, secure and private, a place where you will not be disturbed, overheard or seen this is for your own confidentiality. (I also work from a place that is safe, secure, and private). It is recommended using Teams should take place on a desktop or laptop or tablet (preferably not from a smartphone) and use headphones so conversations will not be overheard and to have a stable broadband speed to prevent disruptions during the counselling sessions such as freezing. All links sent for Teams will be password protected and the link, can only be used once (it is advised not to share this link with anyone). The meeting is locked in security once the session begins. If you do share a computer or email, please think about how best to keep this link safe. No meetings are to be audio or video recorded by either myself as the counsellor and yourself as the client.

**Conclusion** - Thank you for taking the time to read my Online Counselling & Social Media Policy. If you have questions or concerns about any of these policies and procedures, our potential interactions on the Internet, let's discuss this when we meet.

#### **Helpful Links To Understand How I Work**

- Professional conduct Protecting the public BACP: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/protecting-the-public/professional-conduct/>
- The Ethical Framework for Counselling Professional I work with BACP: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions/>
- Data Protection Privacy Policy GDPR General Data Protection Regulation the ICO Information Commissioners' Office T: 0303 123 1113 W: <https://ico.org.uk>