

Stephanie Thurston, LCSW
A Professional Psychotherapy Corporation

Stephanie Thurston, MSW
Licensed Clinical Social Worker
LCS 22417

Private Practice Social Media Policy

This document outlines my office policies related to use of Social Media. Social media includes online communications to seek and share information, provide professional services, and send and receive information. Examples include emails, texting, blogging, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. Please note that social media may not protect your privacy and is considered public communication. The use of it to provide services is limited and only done with your approval.

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.

Search Engines

It is not a regular part of my practice to use search engines to seek information about you. A rare exception would be during a crisis when I have reason to suspect that you may be in danger to yourself or others and I have exhausted other resources. Should this ever occur, I will document it in your clinical record and discuss it with you at your next session. If you should use search engines to seek information about me, I recommend that you discuss any concerns that you may have about me at our very next session.

Interacting

Please do not use SMS (mobile phone text messaging) or messaging on Social Networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube or LinkedIn to contact me. These sites are not 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 an already established client/therapist relationship. Engaging with me 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.

If you need to contact me between sessions, the best way to do so is by phone. Direct email at stephanie@stephaniethurstonlcsw.com is second best for quick, administrative issues such as scheduling and/or changing appointment times. See the email section below for more information regarding email interactions.

Emails

I prefer using email only to arrange or modify appointments and for limited administrative issues. Please do not email content related to therapy sessions because such communication may not be secure nor confidential. Nor should you use emails for emergencies and crisis because I have limited business hours in which I check my emails. 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. 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. Emails received from you and sent to you may become a part of your clinical record.

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Texting

Please do not use SMS (mobile phone text messaging). If you would like to use texting to communicate, you can make that request and I will send you an invitation to use a specific texting app used in my practice. This texting app can be downloaded onto a phone or device. Texting through this app can be used to arrange or modify appointments and for limited administrative issues. Please do not text content related to therapy sessions because such communication may not be secure nor confidential. Nor should you use texts for emergencies and crisis because I have limited business hours in which I check my messages. Emails received from you and sent to you may become a part of your clinical record.

Friending

Friend or contact requests from current or former clients on social networking sites may compromise confidentiality and our therapeutic relationship and are not accepted. There will be no friending via social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. If there is content you wish to share with me from your social media site, bring it to a psychotherapy session for discussion. If you have questions about this, please bring them up when we meet and we can talk more about it.

Posts/Blogs/Tweets

I do not follow, “like”, comment, or interact with current or former client’s on social media accounts, posts, nor blogs. Doing so may compromise confidentiality and/or negatively influence our therapeutic relationship. I may sometimes publish a post or a blog on my professional Website and offer information about my practice and/or general information about mental health topics. I have no expectation for you or any client to follow me on any social media site or to view, “like”, or comment on any account, post or blog. If there is content you wish to share with me from your online site, you may bring it to our next session for discussion. However, if you use an easily recognizable name on a social media site and I happen to notice that you’ve followed me there, we may briefly discuss it and its potential impact on our working relationship.

My primary concern is your privacy. If you share this concern, you are encouraged to consider finding a more private ways to follow my posts or blogs. You are welcome to use your own discretion in choosing whether to follow me.

Note that I will not follow you back. I do not follow current or former clients on blogs or social media sites. My reasoning is that I believe casual viewing of clients’ online content outside of the therapy hour can create confusion in regard to maintaining professional boundaries. 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 me, please bring them into our sessions where we can view and explore them together, during the therapy hour.

Location-Based Services

There are privacy concerns related to location based services on a mobile phone. If you have GPS tracking or a location-based device on your mobile phone, it may compromise your privacy and provide a clue that you are a therapy patient due to your regular check-ins.

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Separate Accounts

I have a professional website (stephaniethurstonlcswh.com) which is used solely for professional matters regarding my private therapy practice. I currently do not have any other social media accounts associated with my private therapy practice. I will not reveal any information about you on my professional site nor will I have an online relationship with you on my professional site. You are not expected to respond or comment on anything that I post. I will not respond to any comment you may have online. If you have a concern about anything I post, please make me aware of it during our next session so that it can be discussed.

I have social media accounts that are related to other businesses. These accounts are used to promote businesses unrelated to my private therapy practice and may include non-clinical psycho-educational and/or coaching/mentorship businesses. These other business accounts are separate from my professional therapy practice. The information posted and shared on these accounts are public and though the information shared may be related to emotional health and wellness, the information shared is non-clinical and is intended to be educational and general in nature. If you have any questions or concerns about anything I share or post, please make me aware of it during our next session so that it can be discussed.

I may also have personal social media accounts which are separate from my professional accounts. These are used for non-professional activities. No information about you will be posted on my personal nor professional account. If you have any questions about my social media policy, please let me know. Should there be any changes to this policy, I will inform you.

Business Review Sites

You may find my psychology 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 my listing on any of these sites, please know that my listing is NOT a request for a testimonial, rating, or endorsement from you as my client.

Professional ethics codes state that it is unethical for clinicians to solicit testimonials from current therapy clients. Of course, you have a 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. 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.

If we are working together, I 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 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 more than welcome to tell anyone you wish that I'm your therapist or how you feel about the treatment I 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. 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.

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(4/20/24)

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Other considerations related to use of mobile phone and other electronic devices:

In addition to the inherent risks of online communications, some of which have been mentioned in this policy, please be aware that if messages and apps are used and/or stored on your physical phone or other electronic devices there is a risk that if your phone or device is lost or stolen or if another person has physical access to that device, those messages could be accessed. If you choose to communicate using a mobile phone or device, you can limit this risk by securing your devices with a passcode.

Please also be aware of any back-up or sync services or products that you may have associated with any of your mobile or electronic devices. Back up and sync services/products can sync/share information on your devices to another computer, device, and/or web-based cloud storage. Cloud based platforms have security risks as well as any physical computer that you may be back up to. Please also be aware that if you have other people sharing access to your accounts including your cloud based sync account and services and you do not have appropriate safeguards in place, your information could be shared with others. Though I am not a technology expert, it is important that I make you aware of these potential confidentiality and security risks of using technology for communication.

If you have questions or concerns about the security of your mobile and electronic devices, I encourage you to reach out to your service providers and or device manufacture.

Conclusion

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

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Name (Print)	Signature	Date
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