

Social Media Policy

This document outlines my office policies related to 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 on the internet.

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.

Texting

Please do not use SMS (mobile phone text messaging) or messaging on social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn to contact me. (See below, Why I Don't Use Email or SMS Texting). 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 patient/therapist relationship. Engaging with me this way could compromise your confidentiality. It also creates the possibility that these exchanges become a part of your legal medical record and will need to be documented and archived in your chart. For example, if you were to text me saying that you are running late for your session due to traffic and later you are written up at work for taking too much time off, your text to me is now part of your legal medical record and can be used against you.

I use a HIPAA-secure texting app called Signal. It is secure because a) it is two-way encrypted; and b) it can be set up so that messages disappear in 24 hours. If you would like to have the option of texting with me, please download and install Signal to your mobile phone. Using the app, we will then be able to text each other.

If you need to contact me between sessions with a clinical issue, the best way to do so is by phone. If you want to confirm an appointment or let me know you're running late and want to text me, please use Signal. My username is DrKristi.

Email

I do not use email with my patients, as email is not completely secure or confidential. (See below, Why I Don't Use Email or SMS Texting). 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 (ISP). If you use gmail, Google retains your emails on their server indefinitely. 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 ISP. 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 medical record. For instance, if you email me that you are enraged at your husband, and later you file for divorce, your email to me is now part of the legal medical record and can be subpoenaed by your husband's attorney.

Friending

I do not accept friend or contact requests from current or former patients on any social networking site (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, or Instagram). When I open a new chart, part of my process is to block new patients on Facebook. This protects both of us, as you will be unable to see anything I post – even if I “like” a post on a news site, for example. I believe that adding patients 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 professional Facebook page (www.facebook.com/drkristiwebb) where I post the “skill of the week” and occasional items of interest. You are welcome to “like” this page and to share anything I post on it. Should you choose to do so, be aware that I never indicate a relationship with anyone who comments or reacts to any post on that page.

I have a YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/drkristiwebb) where I post videos on topics related to my practice. You are welcome to subscribe; I never indicate a relationship to anyone who comments on any video, in order to protect your confidentiality as my patient.

I have a Pinterest page (www.pinterest.com/drkristiwebb) called “Resources in Mental Health” that you are welcome to follow.

Note that if you choose to follow me, I will not follow you back. I only follow other health professionals. My reasoning is that I believe casual viewing of patients' online content outside of the therapy hour can create confusion in regard to whether it's being done as a 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 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.

Use of Search Engines

It is not a part of my practice to search for patients on Google or Facebook or other search engines. 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, by phone, or texting using Signal) 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 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 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 patient.

The American Psychological Association's Ethics Code states under Principle 5.05 that it is unethical for psychologists to solicit testimonials: "Psychologists do not solicit testimonials from current therapy clients/patients or other persons who because of their particular circumstances are vulnerable to undue influence."

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. I urge you to take your own privacy as seriously as I take my commitment of confidentiality to you. 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 patient 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.

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 NC Psychology Board, which oversees licensing in this state, and they will review the services I have provided: North Carolina Psychology Board 895 State Farm Road, Suite 101 Boone, NC 28607 828/262-2258.

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. If you have GPS tracking enabled on your device, it is possible that others may surmise that you are a therapy patient due to check-ins at my 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.

Why I Don't Use Email or SMS Texting

Every email either of us sends or receives contains at least two email addresses: yours and mine. It is also going to be about something related to psychotherapy, even if that is as simple as your appointment time. Email addresses can be used very easily to identify people, and that puts them on the list of 18 things HIPAA defines as "personally identifying." Personally identifying information (your email address) plus health information (you have an appointment with me) equals what HIPAA calls "protected health information" (PHI) and it is the law that I must do everything in my power to keep protected health information private, confidential, and secure.

If you or someone you know has nosy or abusive people in your life – even a curious 3-year-old! - you may be familiar with the vulnerability of phones, laptops, tablets, and desktop computers.

A less obvious version of this problem is in work or school email accounts. Those

accounts are held on the servers of your employer or school. Admins and managers can (and do!) view the emails on those servers. Legal precedents protect employers who do this.

Finally, there is the issue of outright theft or other loss of control over either of our phones, tablets, or laptops. HIPAA mandates that if there is protected health information (that is, personally identifying information such as your email or phone number, plus indication of a therapeutic relationship with me) on a lost or stolen device that I own, I must notify the federal Department of Health and Human Services as well as every patient I have ever worked with. If it's your device that is lost or stolen, and we have emailed, your device may have just opened the door to all of my patients' PHI. I choose to manage that risk by not emailing with patients.

SMS texting is not encrypted. That means that it can easily be intercepted by a hacker. Furthermore, texting presents the same problems as email does with respect to your privacy: your employer, a nosy child or unhappy partner, even the person behind you in line at the coffee shop, presents the possibility that your Protected Health Information will be compromised. It is part of my ethical and legal responsibility to prevent that from happening. For texting with patients who want that option, I use an app called Signal. It is free, and I set it up so that my texts to you disappear in 24 hours. If you want to text me, please download and install Signal.

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, do bring them to my attention so that we can discuss them.

I have read and understand this Social Media Policy.

Signature: _____

Date: _____