

Open Arms Counseling (OAC) has various social media accounts (ie: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+), allowing us to share practice information, news and event updates with other social media users. This document outlines our practice's policy related to use of Social Media. Please read it to understand how we conduct ourselves on the social sites as mental health professionals and how you can expect us to respond to various interactions that may occur between clients and clinicians on the Internet.

This policy is not meant to keep you from sharing that you are in therapy at OAC or with a particular therapist wherever and with whomever you like. Confidentiality means that we cannot tell people that you are a client. You are encouraged to take your own privacy as seriously as we take our commitment of confidentiality to you.

Friending

Therapists are not permitted to accept "friend" requests from current or former clients on their personal social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.). Adding clients as "friends" 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 you meet with your therapist.

Liking/Following

You are welcome to "like" or "follow" our social media feeds and read or share articles we post; however, because social media sites are public spaces, anyone who can see our social media pages can see your post or comment. In addition, when you post, comment, or "like" a page, it will be published on your page as well. Our primary concern is your privacy. You are welcome to use your own discretion in choosing whether to follow our practice.

In order to maintain ethical boundaries, therapists are not permitted to follow you back. We believe casual viewing of clients' 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 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 the therapeutic relationship. If there are things from your online life that you wish to share with your therapist, please bring them into the sessions where those things can be viewed and explored with your counselor, during the therapy session.

Texting/ Messaging

Please do not use SMS (mobile phone text messaging), wall posting, @ replies, messaging on Social Networking sites in order to contact your therapist. Engaging with your therapist in this way could compromise your confidentiality and the therapist may not even receive your message. 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.

Use of Search Engines

It is NOT a regular part of our practice to search for clients on Google or Facebook or other search engines. Due to the fact that therapists are mandated reporters, extremely rare exceptions may be made during times of crisis. If a therapist has reason to suspect you are in danger and you have not been in touch with your therapist via 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 your therapist resorts to such means, the information will be fully documented and discussed with you during your next session.

Business Review Sites

You may find OAC 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 OAC on any of these sites, please know that this listing is not a request for a testimonial, rating, or endorsement from you as a client. The American Counseling Association's Ethics Code prohibits clinicians from requesting testimonials for marketing purposes.

If you are using these sites to communicate your feelings about your therapeutic experience with your therapist, the communication may not be seen by your therapist. You have a right to express yourself on any site you wish; however, due to confidentiality, we cannot respond to any review on any of these sites whether it is positive or negative. Our hope is that you will bring your feelings and reactions concerning your treatment directly into the therapy process. This can be an important part of treatment, even if you decide to go elsewhere.

If you do choose to write something on a business review site, please keep in mind that you may be sharing personally revealing information in a public forum. If you feel your therapist has done something harmful or unethical, and you do not feel comfortable discussing it with your therapist, you should contact the Ohio Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage & Family Therapist Board, which oversees mental health licensing in Ohio, and they will review the situation you have identified. Their address and number is:

Ohio Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage & Family Therapist Board
50 W. Broad St., Suite 1075, Columbus, OH 43215-5919
P) 614-466-0912 F) 614-728-7790

Location-Based Services (LBS)

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 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 our office or if you have a passive LBS app enabled on your phone.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to review our Social Media Policy. If you have any questions about anything within this document, you are encouraged to bring them up with your therapist or contact our administrative office. As new technology develops and the Internet changes, there may be times when this policy needs to be updated. Any updates or changes will be posted in our office and on our website:

www.oacounseling.net