

Teresa Mortell-Stevens Counselling Services

Digital Policy

While therapists are generally trained to keep their personal lives separate from their work with clients, the vast amount of information available online means that achieving complete privacy is increasingly challenging. This document recognizes the complexities of the digital world and aims to address issues that could affect the therapeutic relationship. The guidelines here are informed by Dr. A. Balick's research and reflect my current choices regarding my online presence; I remain open to adjusting these as needed. I ask all clients to read this document to understand my stance on these matters.

1. Keeping Boundaries

An online presence can easily blur the boundaries that are essential to a therapeutic relationship. While I am committed to keeping clinical work within the consultation room, the reach of the digital world can occasionally challenge these boundaries. To protect the integrity of our work together, I have outlined my approach to managing these challenges as transparently as possible below.

2. Secure Communication with ProtonMail

To protect your privacy and maintain the confidentiality of our communication, I use ProtonMail for email correspondence. ProtonMail is an email service with end-to-end encryption, which means that messages are encrypted on my device before they are sent and can only be decrypted by the intended recipient. This encryption ensures that no one else—including ProtonMail itself—can access or read the content of our emails. While no digital communication is completely without risk, ProtonMail's robust security measures offer a high level of protection for our exchanges.

3. Text messages

Feel free to contact me via text message if you need to inform me of a delay or for other brief updates related to your session. However, due to the limited context that text messages provide, it's generally not ideal for discussing more significant matters. For important communications, please call and leave a message, and I will get back to you as soon as possible. Please note that, as a private practitioner, I am not able to provide emergency support, including by phone.

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4. WhatsApp

Please do not send messages via WhatsApp, I will not respond.

5. Online Therapy

I use Doxy.me for online therapy sessions due to its robust security features, including end-to-end encryption and user-friendly interface. To ensure a secure and private environment, I ask clients to connect from a quiet space with a stable internet connection and to use a device that meets the platform's requirements.

Please note that I will not record sessions unless previously discussed and agreed upon for training or supervision purposes. In case of any technical issues during our session, we will have a backup plan to connect via phone.

For the integrity of our therapeutic relationship and to ensure a safe space for open dialogue, I kindly ask that you do not record our online therapy sessions. This policy is in place to protect your confidentiality and to maintain the trust necessary for effective therapy.

While online therapy has many benefits, it may not replace in-person sessions for all clients. If you have any concerns or questions about technology use during our sessions, feel free to reach out.

6. Social Media

I maintain a private Facebook account for personal use and a LinkedIn profile for professional purposes. To respect the boundaries of the therapeutic relationship, I keep my Facebook profile private and do not accept friend requests from current or former clients.

While I have an online presence, I am committed to ensuring our work together remains within the consultation room. Therefore, I do not knowingly follow, connect with, or engage with current or former clients on any social media platform. You are, of course, free to view or follow my public profiles at your discretion, though I encourage you to consider the impact on our confidentiality and therapeutic boundaries before doing so.

I also recognize that some overlap between social networks is inevitable, particularly on platforms like Facebook, where connections may come to light unexpectedly. Should this occur, I welcome the opportunity to discuss any questions or concerns about it during our session.

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7. Use of google

It's common for people to Google professionals before reaching out, and you may have looked me up prior to contacting me. While I recognize this as a normal part of modern life, I choose not to Google my clients before we meet, as I prefer to learn about you directly, from our sessions together. You are, of course, free to look up information about me online. However, if you come across any information that raises questions, I encourage you to bring them up with me at our earliest opportunity.

8. Blogging Activities

As a professional, I am committed to maintaining clear boundaries to support a safe and respectful therapeutic environment. This policy outlines my approach to personal blogging activities, acknowledging the nuances of a digital presence in today's world.

1. **Content Boundaries:** My blog is intended for educational, reflective, or professional purposes and does not include any information about my clients, therapeutic cases, or any interactions that could identify individuals.
2. **Privacy and Confidentiality:** Protecting client confidentiality is a priority. Any online content or blog post will strictly adhere to confidentiality guidelines and will not discuss or reference client experiences.
3. **Professional Integrity:** I uphold a commitment to ethical standards in all my blogging activities. My online posts are thoughtfully crafted to reflect my personal insights or general topics relevant to my field, and they are not intended as a substitute for professional advice or therapy.
4. **Boundaries with Clients:** In order to maintain clear professional boundaries, I do not engage with clients or accept comments related to therapy on my blog. If clients choose to view or follow my blog, I ask that they keep the therapeutic relationship and online content distinct from one another.
5. **Content Evolution:** As my knowledge and perspectives evolve, so too may my online content. I periodically review my posts to ensure they align with current ethical guidelines and my professional standards.

By adhering to these principles, I aim to foster a transparent and respectful digital presence that supports the integrity of the therapeutic relationship.

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This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains current and supportive of our work together. If you have any questions or suggestions, please feel free to reach out to me directly.