

# \* Social Media Etiquette

for Counsellors and  
Counsellors in Training

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COUNSELLOR  
RESOURCES



# \* Aims and Objectives

**Aim:** To increase awareness and understanding of how to behave and use social media as a counsellor

## **Objectives:**

- ✓ To think about the considerations of using social media as a counsellor
- ✓ To increase awareness of confidentiality in social media interactions
- ✓ To learn how to approach and use social media safely and ethically

# \* Overview of Social Media

“Social media is a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities. By design, social media is internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content.”<sup>1</sup>

- ✓ 4.2 Billion people use social media worldwide
- ✓ On average, they spend 2.25 hours a day on it.
- ✓ Facebook is the most popular social media site with 2.74 billion monthly users.<sup>2</sup>





# \* What Do People Use Social Media for?

1. Stay up to date with news and current events, 36.5%
2. Find funny or entertaining content, 35%
3. Fill up spare time, 34.4%
4. Stay in touch with what my friends are doing, 33%
5. Share photos or videos with others, 27.9%
6. Research products to buy, 27.5%
7. General networking with other people, 26.8%
8. Because a lot of my friends are on them, 25.1%
9. Share my opinion, 23.4%
10. Meet new people, 21.3%<sup>2</sup>



# \* Social Media Usage for Counsellors

All of the previous mentioned usages plus:

- ✓ Develop and share their skills and knowledge
- ✓ Help the public and others understand what they do
- ✓ Network with other professionals nationally and internationally
- ✓ Socialise with others who understand the profession
- ✓ Raise the profile of their profession
- ✓ Marketing

# \* Counsellor Considerations

- ✓ Our Job
- ✓ Ethics
- ✓ Good Practice
- ✓ Professionalism
- ✓ Reputation
- ✓ Privacy Settings
- ✓ Organisational social media policy
- ✓ Blurred Boundaries between Personal / Professional



# \* Client Considerations

- ✓ Confidentiality
- ✓ Feelings
- ✓ Frame of reference
- ✓ Impact of your comments
- ✓ Clients researching their therapist / counsellor
- ✓ Right to discuss their case







## \* What happens when things go wrong?

- ✓ Develop a bad reputation
- ✓ Lose clients
- ✓ Lose a job
- ✓ Be reported to, or sanctioned by, your membership body



# \* Navigating the Minefield

Social media isn't for:

- ✓ Client discussions
- ✓ Your thoughts/feelings on clients
- ✓ Supervision
- ✓ Personal therapy





## \* Awareness: The Disinhibition Effect

Every person behaves differently online than they would in face-to-face interactions.

“It's well known that people say and do things in cyberspace that they wouldn't ordinarily say or do in the face-to-face world. They loosen up, feel more uninhibited, express themselves more openly. Researchers call this the ‘disinhibition effect.’”

Suler. J. 2004, The Psychology of Cyberspace.

## \* Tips for Dealing with the Disinhibition Effect

- ✓ Take care with your tone and use of language.
- ✓ Think carefully before swearing or being overly critical about other people and avoid using inappropriate/offensive language.
- ✓ Try to remain polite and considerate with others even if they have been rude or unpleasant towards you. It's always your choice to respond/react or not.



# \* Awareness

- ✓ Social networking sites are public.
- ✓ Posts/Comments are permanent unless they've been moderated.
- ✓ Your post could be distributed, shared, commented upon and accessed by anyone.
- ✓ A client might react to your post/comment.
- ✓ People can search within a group for all the comments that a person has made and that a comment might be seen out of context.
- ✓ We all work from our own frame of reference, so assumptions can easily be made.





# \* Awareness

- ✓ People may build up a distorted view of you/your private practice from your social media activity.
- ✓ Anything you share should be considered given the context of our profession.
- ✓ Your organisation's image may be affected by any comments you make.
- ✓ Respect people's difference and diversity; their lives are not up for debate.
- ✓ You have a right to express your views openly – but not to do so in a way that causes offence to others or infringes on their own rights.



# \* Awareness

- ✓ Avoid making comments that could be perceived as racist, sexist, homophobic or otherwise prejudiced, even in jest/satire.



## \* Boundaries

- ✓ Do not disclose any client information or detail.
- ✓ Generally, do not discuss/talk about other people, as it saves any clashes of confidentiality/privacy.
- ✓ Revealing an isolated piece of information may be one piece of a jigsaw puzzle, but can help form a recognisable picture when other pieces are added.
- ✓ If you need resources, ask for the subject but do not qualify/justify the request.

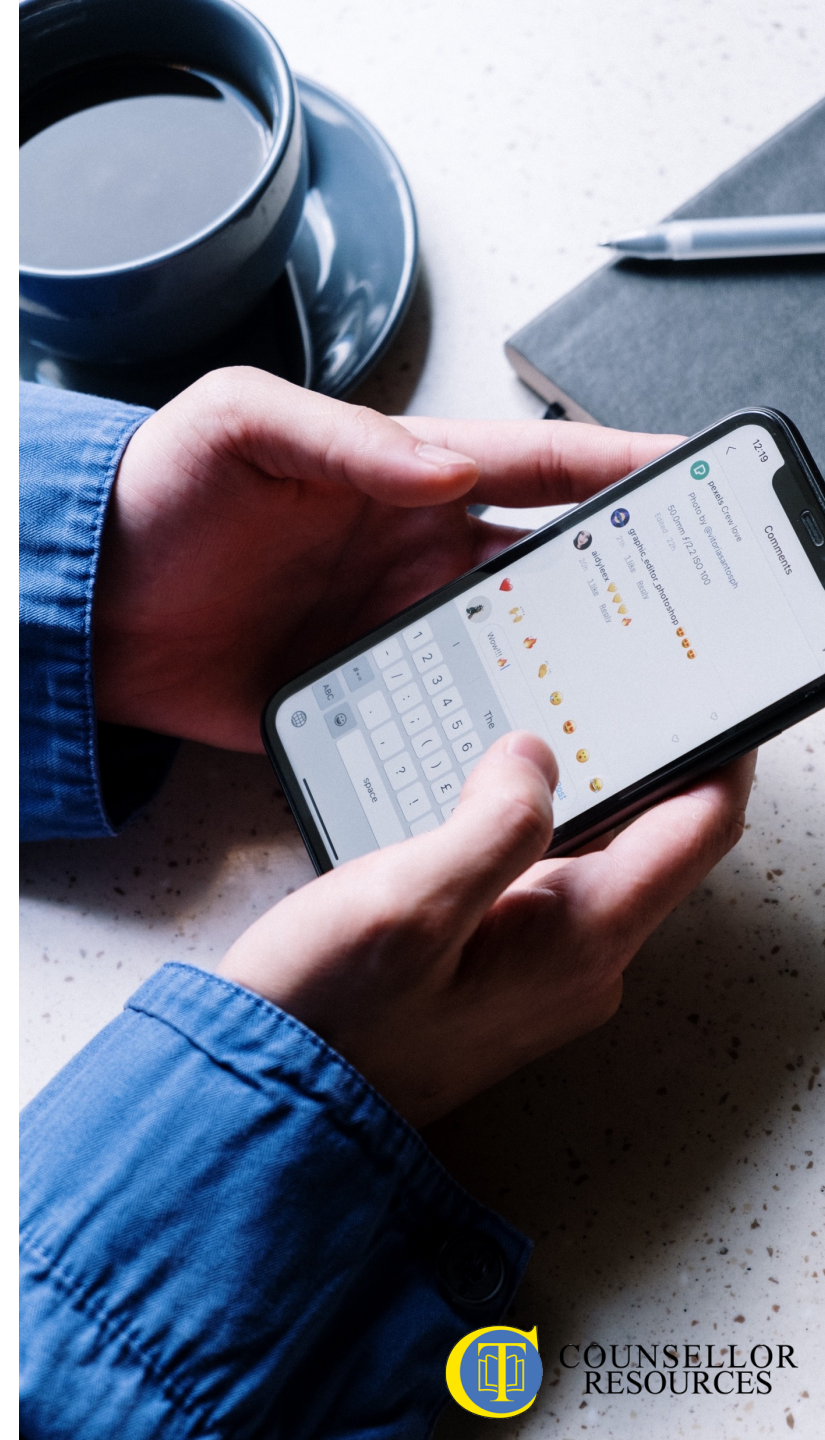
## \* Examples

- ✓ I've got a client who has manic depression – does anyone have any information about it?
- ✓ He's 62, has been suicidal and lost his wife; I'm unsure how to deal with this. What do I focus on first?
- ✓ I've got a couple of private practice clients I see for pro-bono because of their financial situation.
- ✓ Can anyone suggest any tools for anger management?  
I think he's triggered by...



# \* When you're posting/responding

- ✓ If you are uncertain about whether to post a comment, don't do it.
- ✓ Avoid social media sites when under the influence of alcohol or when stressed, tired or upset.
- ✓ Avoid making comments in the heat of the moment. It's always your choice to respond or not.
- ✓ Be respectful and respond appropriately to requests.
- ✓ English isn't everyone's first language and, thus, things can get lost in translation/understanding, especially if someone is sarcastic.



**The Most Important Thing:**  
**Keep on posting!**

# \* Counselling Tutor Rules

1. Community: Be Supportive, Respectful & Courteous
2. Content: No Prejudicial or Hateful Comments / Posts
3. Confidentiality: Be Discreet
4. Appropriate Social Media Usage
5. Privacy
6. No Advertising, Marketing...
7. No spam, Irrelevant links, or Piracy
8. No Unrelated/Removed Topics
9. No Research Requests/Surveys



## \* References

- ✓ Dollarhide, M., (2021). *Social Media Definition*. [online] Investopedia. Available at: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp> [Accessed 1 September 2021].
- ✓ Kemp, S., (2021). *Digital 2021: The latest insights into the 'state of digital' – We Are Social*. [online] We Are Social. Available at: <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2021/01/digital-2021-the-latest-insights-into-the-state-of-digital> [Accessed 1 September 2021].
- ✓ Suler, Ph.D., J., (2004). *Psychology of Cyberspace - The Online Disinhibition Effect*. [online] Truecenterpublishing.com. Available at: <https://truecenterpublishing.com/psycyber/disinhibit.html> [Accessed 1 September 2021].



## \* Useful Resources

- ✓ <https://counsellingtutor.com/professional-practice-for-counsellors/ethics-in-counselling/>
- ✓ <https://counsellingtutor.com/boundaries-in-counselling/>
- ✓ <https://counsellingtutor.com/confidentiality-in-counselling/>
- ✓ <https://counsellingtutor.com/disinhibition-effect-in-online-therapy/Confidentiality>
- ✓ <https://counsellingtutor.com/supervision-in-counselling/>