

## **Privacy Policy**

### **Counselling Confidentiality and Privacy**

Everything discussed in counselling, and any personal information exchanged between you and the counsellor is confidential and protected. This means that your information will not be knowingly released to anyone else without your permission. This confidentiality extends to all issues except those that the counsellor is required by law to report. These exceptions include:

- When a person is at risk of attempting suicide, harming themselves or another person.
- When child abuse is occurring, child protective services must be informed.
- When laws or legal proceedings require release of information.

The counsellor works with a team, for your benefit and her own professional support and accountability. Therefore, when you enter counselling with the counsellor, you are giving your permission for her to discuss information from your sessions with her supervisor and professional support group, as well as any other health care workers in your circle of care who may be entitled to such information. All matters of confidentiality and professional ethics will be respected in this process of supervision and accountability. The limited information shared between team members is completely confidential between the people involved, will not be shared with others, and will be used only to enhance and improve the counselling process.

If there is a specific person or group in your circle of care that you do not want the counsellor to share your information with, you may discuss this with the counsellor, and refuse to consent to the release of information to these people. The counsellor then will not share information with these people without your consent, unless there are other exceptions to keeping confidentiality that must legally be followed.

Where more than one counsellor works in a co-counselling/co-facilitating role for a group, any information shared in the group setting may be shared and discussed in confidence between the counsellors responsible for facilitating or moderating the group, for the benefit of the group and the group members, whether or not all counsellors are present for all group meetings. The counsellors may also share limited information about the group as needed with their respective supervisors. All matters of confidentiality and professional ethics will be respected in this process of professional consultation.

When confidential information is exchanged between professionals, this will be shared only on a "need to know" basis. In other words, only those who are entitled to the information by virtue of their involvement and role will receive the information, and then only as much as is needed in order to adequately fulfill their role in the counselling and support process.

### **Technological Privacy**

Any information obtained or stored electronically is protected as much as possible from being accessed by those not entitled to it. This is done through the use of secure communication, storage, and password protection. No information is ever sold to anyone else, nor is any information used for any purpose, other than the purpose for which it is requested.

The counsellor insures that the information you transmit to her is kept secure and private on her end. You are responsible for keeping any information you transmit or have access to secure on your own end. The counsellor is not responsible for others discovering private information that you did not adequately store, erase, or transmit securely.

While we do take precautions to put security measures in place to insure that unauthorized persons are not intercepting or accessing electronic messages and information, please be aware that the internet is not an entirely secure environment. Therefore, while we do our best to prevent it, there is a small possibility that some information may be accessed by people it is not intended for. Be assured that we will not purposely allow personal information to be accessed electronically by unauthorized persons.

**Instant messaging and email:** Information transmitted through the website forms remains secure, as it stays on the website, and then is transferred to the counsellor's storage system. Regular email is transmitted across the internet, so is less secure, unless it is transmitted from secure email to secure email. Instant messaging security varies from system to system. The one that seems the most secure of common messaging systems is skype. When you instant message, your communication is kept private between you and the person or persons you are chatting with, in conjunction with the privacy policies of the respective message system you are using. Check those policies if you are unsure about communicating through a particular medium. Your personal settings can also either keep your messages secure, or make them available to others. It is your responsibility to make sure your settings are configured for the security level you want.

**Support Chatrooms:** The support chatroom groups function in a java based environment, with the chatroom settings maintained by two professional counsellors. Both counsellors have equal access to all public and private logs in this chatroom system, and handle them confidentially in accordance with professional ethics. Other chatters only have access to the chats they are present for.

**Support Forum:** This forum is hosted in a public environment, with some areas open to the public, while other areas are set to be private and accessible only to members who have been given permission to access these areas. Please post accordingly. Take care of yourself by being aware of where you are posting personal information, whether it is in a public or private setting, and be discreet in regards to what you post of a sensitive and personal nature. Post only what you are comfortable posting and having other people know about you.

**Members of the chat and forum are expected to follow two basic guidelines:**

1. Respect and courtesy is to be shown to all. In other words, treat each other as kindly as you would want to be treated.
2. Confidentiality - What is said here STAYS here.

Refusal to abide by these guidelines is grounds for immediate ban. We take your privacy and safety very seriously.

**\*\*Please note\*\* While we attempt to make every effort to keep the chat and forum secure, and aim to keep it a safe place in which to share your struggles, it is only as secure as each of its members make it. If you are uncomfortable discussing certain information openly in a support group situation, we encourage you to send a private message to one of the counsellors and/or set an appointment to discuss your issues.**

Should we change our privacy policies at any time, this will be posted on the website.

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