

VALLIERE & COUNSELING ASSOCIATES, Inc.

Forensic Treatment Services

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Social Media Policy

Valliere & Counseling Associates, Inc. recognizes the significant role social media now plays in the communication and sharing of information. However, the use of social media has created some complex situations in the medical and mental health environment when social media is used by either therapists/the practice and clients. Not only are there important issues of confidentiality and HIPAA, there are ethical issues involving dual relationships, violation of boundaries, and client/clinician privacy. In an effort to address these potential problems, Valliere & Counseling Associates, Inc. has adopted the following policies. All clinicians who are employed or contracted by this practice are expected to understand and adhere to this policy. Please inform us if you are aware of a clinician who is not following these practices.

Email

Use of email with clients is a complex issue. Email is held on the server and is not secure. You cannot guarantee who is seeing your email. Each email might be part of your medical record. However, sometimes an email is the most efficient and timely way to respond to an issue. HIPAA does not prohibit use of unsecured email as long as reasonable efforts are taken to ensure protection of the information.

If you would like your therapist to email you, you must put that in writing, outlining which email to use and what information you are comfortable conveying. Please be aware that use of email is not secure nor encrypted. While the staff uses a password protected, business only email, this email is not generally used for client information. Emails might be held on a server. If you email us, please be aware that this will be taken as permission to respond by email until we are able to have you document your permission. Be assured that the staff takes reasonable steps to ensure your privacy and confidentiality. Staff might respond to emails on a mobile device that will be password protected and for use only by the therapist.

Email is best used for short messages. Please be clear that your clinician is not required to answer emails outside of practice hours and discuss a reasonable expectation for a response. We have an emergency number for crises and do not guarantee any expectation for time with email correspondence.

Texting Clients

Texting clients is **prohibited** in any way. A phone is an unsecured form of information; confidentiality cannot be insured. All text messages can be made part of a legal record in the case of litigation and are maintained by the communications provider, again a violation of information security.

This prohibition of text messages also includes any kind of texting or messaging (IM) on social media sites, web-based games (ie Words with Friends). Do not use wall postings, @replies, or other electronic forms of communication over the Internet. It is not secure and any exchanges again are part of a medical record and can be part of a legal record.

Facebook and LinkedIn (includes Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and other social media accounts)

Valliere & Counseling Associates, Inc. maintains a website for business and communication and information purposes. Also, a number of staff have LinkedIn accounts. While individuals can “like” our page, they cannot “friend” us.

Clinicians **may NOT friend clients** or **be connected to clients on LinkedIn**, even if they are other professionals. This is an ethical issue and relates both to confidentiality and dual relationships.

Reviews/Testimonials

There are many websites or search engines out there that allow individuals to put reviews of services on business listings (ie. Healthgrades). While we cannot control what any of our clients write about us anywhere on the Internet, we must not respond to these comments, which would potentially be a violation of confidentiality. We also cannot solicit reviews and testimonials, a direct violation of ethical guidelines.

We welcome feedback in the office. Be aware that linking yourself with our agency or using your real name will reveal you as a client.

Location Based Services

Be aware of the tracking and stalking opportunities offered by location based services or phone and social media GPS services. If you “check in” at places or geotag, you are informing others where you go or where you might be. This is not always protected in privacy settings. If you regularly come to our office, you may be revealing your participation in care. In a violent situation, this can be very problematic.