

TEXAS STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS

Guidelines for Using Social Media

The mission of the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors (“Board”) is to protect the public by ensuring that professional counseling services are provided to the people of Texas by qualified and competent practitioners who adhere to established professional standards. This mission, derived from the Licensed Professional Counselor Act, supersedes the interest of any individual or special interest group. It is with this mission in mind that the Board set out to develop these guidelines for using social media.

Social media, as that term is used herein, is an umbrella term that includes the various activities that integrate technology and social interaction such as websites, microblogging (e.g., Facebook and Twitter), and all other forms of social networking.

When using social media, members of the profession are called upon to consider their ethical and professional responsibilities and the context in which social media are being used, and then to use their professional judgment accordingly.

It is essential to consider the appropriateness of any modality used in the delivery of services or in professional communication relative to the client to be served. As with any type of modality of service delivery or communication, assuming that social media would be appropriate for use with all clients would be an error in judgment. Consideration of individual issues such as culture, language, access to technology, client comfort and competence with technology, service needs, as well as the professional’s competence in using the modality, are all important.

Licensees who choose to use social media in their practice should take precautions to be mindful and remain in compliance with all relevant ethical, professional, and legal responsibilities, in addition to policies and guidelines in Texas. Below are guidelines that licensees should consider when using social media with clients.

- Ensure that the proper informed consent is conducted prior to engaging in social media with clients.
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries with clients and their surrogates, whether online or in person.
- Provide business practices and professional counseling services in a manner that safeguards the privacy and confidentiality of clients.
- Licensees should evaluate the appropriateness of using specific social media with each client, considering such individual issues such as culture, language, service needs, access to technology, client comfort and competence with technology.
- Do not provide professional counseling advice to specific clients online unless this is done via the secure portal of a practice or institution.
- Do not disclose individually identifiable protected health information or post images or videos online.

- Politely turn down requests from clients to connect on personal social networking sites. It may be acceptable to accept requests on professional accounts, provided that the account is used for professional purposes only.
- Communicate and engage in social media in personal and professional settings with civility and respect for others.
- Consider any social media post as permanent, even after it has been deleted.
- Maintain current knowledge and training on social media platforms being used in the professional counseling practice pertaining to all individuals, devices, and accounts.
- Upon discovery of unprofessional or inappropriate content online posted by a professional colleague, notify the individual so that they may remove the post or change their methods of communicating.
- When marketing your practice online, be sure to adhere to laws and rules governing advertising.

The Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council has the authority to discipline licensees for unprofessional behavior relating to the inappropriate use of social media. Disciplinary actions range from an administrative penalty to the revocation of a license. Examples of unprofessional behavior can include:

- Inappropriate communication with clients online
- Online sexual misconduct
- Use of the internet for unprofessional behavior
- Online misrepresentation of credentials
- Online violations of client confidentiality
- Failure to reveal conflicts of interest online
- Online derogatory remarks regarding a client
- Any engagement in online discriminatory language or practices