

Counselling Services – Privacy Policy

Category: Academic – Students, Teaching, Faculty

Approval: PVP

Responsibility: Vice-President Students

Date: October 2009

Privacy of personal information is an important principle to the Trent University Counselling Centre. We are committed to collecting, using and disclosing personal information responsibly and only to the extent necessary for the goods and services we provide. We also try to be open and transparent as to how we handle personal information. This document describes our privacy policies.

WHAT IS PERSONAL INFORMATION?

Personal information is information about an identifiable individual. Personal information includes information that relates to their personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age, home address or phone number, ethnic background, family status), their mental health (e.g., mental health history, health conditions, counselling services received by them) or their activities and views (e.g., academic or work history, religious affiliation, politics, opinions expressed by an individual, an opinion or evaluation of an individual). Personal information is to be contrasted with business information (e.g., an individual's business address and telephone number), which is not protected by privacy legislation.

WHO WE ARE

The Trent University Counselling Centre is a branch of Student Affairs. It is composed of one full time coordinator, two contract therapists (one full time & one 3 days/wk) one contract Psychiatrist (1.25 days/wk), one sexual assault outreach worker (1day/wk) and one full time Administrative Assistant.

Within the service, professional, interns, and practicum students may consult among each other in order to insure that the best service is provided while making every effort to preserve the anonymity of the person concerned. All staff employed at the Trent University Counselling Centre are required to give their signed assurance that they will follow appropriate privacy principles.

WE COLLECT PERSONAL INFORMATION: PRIMARY PURPOSES

Like all University based Counselling Centres, we collect, use and disclose personal information in order to serve our clients. For our clients, the primary purpose for collecting personal information is to provide personal counselling. For example, we collect information about a client's mental health history, including their family history, physical condition and function in social situations in order to help us assess what their mental health needs are, to advise them of their options and then to provide the counselling care they choose to have. A second primary purpose is to obtain a baseline of mental functioning and social information so that in providing ongoing counselling services we can identify changes that are occurring over time. It would be rare for us to collect such information

without the client's express consent, but this might occur in an emergency. Our duty to report is defined by our professional body and the Mental Health Act.

WE COLLECT PERSONAL INFORMATION: RELATED & SECONDARY PURPOSES

Like most organizations, we also collect, use and disclose information for purposes related to or secondary to our primary purposes. The most common examples of our related and secondary purposes are as follows:

- To invoice clients for goods or services (i.e.: missed appts; resources not returned)
- To advise clients and others of special events or opportunities (e.g., a workshop, development of a new service) that we have available.
- We review client and other files for the purpose of ensuring that we provide high quality services, including assessing the performance of our staff. In addition, external consultants (e.g., auditors, lawyers) may on our behalf do audits and continuing quality improvement reviews of our services, including reviewing client files and interviewing our staff.
- The Coordinator of the Trent University Counselling Centre is a member of the Ontario College of Social Workers. Therefore, this regulatory body may inspect our records and interview our staff as a part of their regulatory activities in the public interest.
- Clients or other individuals we deal with may have questions about our goods or services after they have been received. We also provide ongoing services for many of our clients over a period of months or years for which our previous records are helpful. We retain our client information for a minimum of seven years to enable us to respond to those questions and provide these services (our regulatory College also requires us to retain our client records).

PROTECTING PERSONAL INFORMATION

We understand the importance of protecting personal information. For that reason, we have taken the following steps:

- Paper information is either under supervision or secured in a locked or restricted area.
- Electronic hardware is either under supervision or secured in a locked or restricted area at all times. In addition, passwords are used on computers.
- Paper information is transmitted through sealed & addressed envelopes
- Electronic information is transmitted through a direct line.
- Our staff is trained to collect, use and disclose personal information only as necessary to fulfill their duties and in accordance with our privacy policy.
- External consultants and agencies with access to personal information must enter into privacy agreements with us.

RETENTION AND DESTRUCTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION

We need to retain personal information for some time to ensure that we can answer any questions you might have about the services provided and for our own accountability to external regulatory bodies. However, we do not want to keep personal information too long in order to protect your privacy. We keep our client files for about seven years. We destroy paper files containing personal information by shredding.

YOU CAN LOOK AT YOUR INFORMATION

With only a few exceptions, you have the right to see what personal information we hold about you. Often all you have to do is ask. We can help you identify what records we might have about you. We will also try to help you understand any information you do not understand (e.g., short forms, technical language, etc.). We will need to confirm your identity, if we do not know you, before providing you with this access. We reserve the right to charge a nominal fee for such requests. We may ask you to put your request in writing. If we cannot give you access, we will tell you within 30 days if at all possible and tell you the reason, as best we can, as to why we cannot give you access. If you believe there is a mistake in the information, you have the right to ask for it to be corrected. This applies to factual information and not to any professional opinions we may have formed. We may ask you to provide documentation that our files are wrong. Where we agree that we made a mistake, we will make the correction and notify anyone to whom we sent this information. If we do not agree that we have made a mistake, we will still agree to include in our file a brief statement from you on the point and we will forward that statement to anyone else who received the earlier information.

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION?

The Trent University Access and Privacy Officer can be reached at:

University Secretariat

1st floor, Bata Library

748-1011 extension 1387

privacy@trentu.ca

The access and privacy officer will attempt to answer any questions or concerns you might have. If you wish to make a formal complaint about our privacy practices, you may make it in writing to this office. The access and privacy officer will acknowledge receipt of your complaint, ensure that it is investigated promptly and that you are provided with a formal decision and reasons in writing.

If you have a concern about the professionalism or competence of our services or the mental or physical capacity of any of our professional staff we would ask you to discuss those concerns with us. However, if we cannot satisfy your concerns, you are entitled to complain to our regulatory body:

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS & SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS

80 Bloor Street West, Suite 700

Toronto, ON, M5S 2V1

PHONE: (416) 972-9882

This policy is made under the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act which took full effect in Ontario and most other provinces on January 1st 2004. Trent University has adopted new a new administrative Policy on the Management of Personal Information in Commercial Activities which is available on line at www.trentu.ca/admin.html In addition, The Council of Ontario Universities has provided Communication Guide to explain the federal privacy legislation and highlights of this document are also available on the web site.

Contact Officer:

Associate Vice-President Students

Date for Next Review:

October 2019

Related Policies, Procedures & Guidelines

- a) Policy on the Protection of Personal Information

Policies Superseded by This Policy:

- a) N/A