

SOCIAL MEDIA

COSRT MEMBER POLICY

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OVERVIEW

COSRT sets and upholds the highest standards of professionalism and to promote ethical behaviour, attitudes and judgement on the part of our members. This is covered in our Code of Ethics. Members should understand that professional conduct requirements apply in the online environment. Therefore, please apply the Code of Ethics and use your ethical and professional judgement when posting content online.

This document outlines COSRT's position on the use of social media and gives guidance for using social media responsibly.

Everyone should be aware that internet/social networking sites are public and permanent. Once something has been uploaded or posted, it is still possible to trace it or be saved by others, even if it is subsequently deleted.

BOUNDARIES

All therapists should consider if they engage with social media and, if so, how. It is important to ensure that Members ensure the use of any social media meets requirements from the COSRT Code of Ethics. That includes:

Consistently evaluate the impacts or potential impacts of your actions or behaviours, giving special consideration to:

- a. The distinct characteristics of the profession served by COSRT including therapeutic services which deal with sensitive topics including sex, intimacy, and relationships.
- b. The requirement for robust boundaries and discretion that these characteristics emphasise.
- c. The fact that an action or behaviour need not be illegal to harm the reputation or trust and confidence in COSRT or the profession it serves.
- d. The reasonable expectation that those within the profession served by COSRT may be held to a higher standard than those that would apply to those outside the profession.

COSRT requires that practitioners make a clear distinction between their online personal and professional presence, with regard to emails, websites and social media accounts.

Members should have a separate email address for personal and professional use and that all possible steps are taken to ensure confidentiality of professional emails.

Members are required not to use any joint email address with partner/other family member for professional purposes. It is important that if one email programme is used to collect emails from a variety of different accounts, e.g. Outlook, that it is not jointly used by a partner/other family member and is password protected.

Where confidential documents are sent electronically, they should have password or other forms of protection against being opened or tampered with by a third party.

Smartphones and tablets that are synchronised with a main computer need to be protected from being accessed by a partner/other family member.

If computers are used by people other than the practitioner then all confidential, professional material needs to be password protected.

Practitioners will have up to date antivirus and antiphishing protection and be registered under the Data Protection Act.

PRIVACY

Members are strongly advised to protect their own privacy. This means regularly checking your privacy settings as well as choosing carefully the information you make available online.

Be aware that comments or images posted by friends or family may be accessible as their privacy settings may not be set as rigorously as your own. Pictures of you taken by other people may be tagged and it is recommended that you monitor this as much as possible and request people untag any inappropriate images.

Members need to be aware that most search engines will guide members of the public to any sites that could have personal information posted about them.

Also note that when social media sites update their services, sometimes the privacy settings are automatically reset to a default setting.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

However you identify yourself on your professional account you are required to act professionally at all times and be guided by the Code of Ethics.

We suggest all therapists develop their own Social Media policy and this be shared as part of the contractual arrangements on commencement of work with Service Users.

When members are involved in social networking sites they may inadvertently become involved in ethically questionable conversations. If this occurs members are required to act according to ethical principles and standards.

Members must not:

- Establish online relationships which may compromise the professional relationship with Service Users.
- Accept friend requests from Service Users, and to decline this request using formal means of communication.
- Discuss clinical work or work-related issues online in any non-secure medium.
- Publish pictures of Service Users, trainees, supervisees or other service users online without permission.
- Post defamatory comments about individuals or institutions. This applies to all comments made on personal or professional accounts. Defamation law applies to any comments posted on the internet.

- Use social-networking sites/internet/blogs for raising professional and/or ethical concerns or whistle-blowing.

JURISDICTION

Therapists should recognise the need to obey the law of the country/area they practice. This is not just where they are based but, if using technology, it includes where the Service User is based.

It is a therapist's responsibility to be fully informed of information if working internationally. Points to consider are:

- Include in your literature/advertising/contract that you operate under the jurisdiction of the law of the United Kingdom.
- Check that your professional indemnity insurance covers you to work abroad including checking any limits on such practice.
- It is important to ensure the safety of data transfer and storage. For further information please visit the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) website – Data Protection Principles – principle 8 'Sending personal data outside the European Economic Area'.



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