

# Association for Psychological Accreditation

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Home of The International Psychological Standards & Accreditation Council

## APA ONLINE CONDUCT & PROTECTION AGREEMENT



# Online Conduct & Protection Agreement

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this Social Media Conduct & Protection Agreement (“Agreement”) is to establish clear expectations and professional standards regarding ALL APA Members use of social media. This Agreement is designed to:

- Protect client confidentiality and privacy
- Maintain ethical and professional conduct
- Uphold the reputation and integrity of the counselling profession and organisation
- Reduce risks related to online communication and digital presence
- Ensure compliance with applicable laws, professional codes of ethics, and regulatory standards

## 2. Scope

This Agreement applies to:

- All counsellors, therapists, interns, consultants, contractors, volunteers, and staff providing professional services whilst affiliated to APA. i.e ALL APA MEMBERS
- All social media platforms and digital spaces, including but not limited to:
  - Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, X (Twitter), YouTube
  - Blogs, podcasts, online forums, and professional discussion groups
  - Messaging apps and private online communities
  - Personal and professional accounts where the professional may be identifiable as an APA Member.

This Agreement applies to both **work-related and personal social media activity** where a professional's identity or client relationships may be implicated.

## 3. Definitions

**Social Media:** Any online platform that allows creation or sharing of content or participation in social networking.

**Confidential Information:** Any information that could directly or indirectly identify a client or disclose client-related details, including names, images, stories, session content, case details, or contextual information.

**Professional Boundary:** The ethical and therapeutic limits governing relationships between counsellors and clients.



## 4. Core Ethical Principles

Members agree to conduct themselves online in accordance with:

- Professional codes of ethics governing counselling practice
- Confidentiality and privacy obligations
- Respect for client dignity and autonomy
- Professional integrity and competence
- Non-exploitation of therapeutic relationships
- Cultural sensitivity and non-discrimination

## 5. Confidentiality and Client Protection

### 5.1 Absolute Protection of Client Identity

APA Members must never:

- Share identifiable client information
- Post photos, videos, or audio involving clients
- Discuss client sessions or cases in ways that could lead to identification
- Share “disguised” or “anonymous” client stories if there is any risk of recognition

### 5.2 Case Examples and Educational Content

If using examples for educational purposes:

- Content must be fully fictionalised or based on composite cases
- No real timelines, demographics, or unique identifiers may be used
- Content must not resemble any current or former client in a recognisable way

### 5.3 Screenshots and Digital Communications

APA Members must not share:

- Client messages or emails
- Online therapy session content
- Testimonials or feedback without formal written consent compliant with ethical guidelines and local laws



## 6. Professional Boundaries and Client Interaction

APA Members agree to:

- Avoid accepting friend or follow requests from current clients on personal accounts
- Avoid initiating or engaging in direct messaging with clients through social media
- Maintain clear separation between personal and professional digital identities
- Use official clinical communication channels only

If a client attempts contact through social media:

- The APA should not engage through Social Media
- The client should be redirected to approved communication channels
- The interaction should be documented and included in the professionals Supervision Tracker

## 7. Professional Representation Online

APA Members must:

- Present accurate credentials, qualifications, and scope of practice
- Avoid misleading claims or guarantees of outcomes
- Clearly distinguish between educational content and therapy services
- Avoid giving personalised clinical advice to individuals online

When providing general mental health information:

- Include appropriate disclaimers stating content is educational and not therapy
- Encourage individuals to seek professional support when needed

## 8. Ethical Communication and Public Conduct

APA Members agree to:

- Avoid derogatory, discriminatory, or harassing language
- Refrain from public disputes with clients or former clients
- Maintain professionalism even in personal accounts where professional identity is known
- Avoid posting content that could compromise public trust in the profession.
- Where APA Whistleblowing protocols apply. Posts must include notification that evidence has been verified.



## 9. Security and Digital Risk Management

APA Members must:

- Use strong passwords and secure authentication methods
- Enable privacy settings where appropriate
- Avoid discussing work on unsecured platforms
- Maintain your devices in a protected offline status (Airplane Mode) when not needing to be online.
- Be cautious about location tagging or identifiable workplace references (especially when working from home)
- Report suspected privacy breaches immediately to law enforcement, your supervisor, the ICO.

## 10. Testimonials, Marketing, and Promotions

APA Members must:

- Comply with ethical advertising standards
- Avoid soliciting testimonials from current clients
- Ensure marketing content does not exploit vulnerability or create unrealistic expectations
- Obtain written informed consent when testimonials are ethically permissible

## 11. Reporting and Incident Response

In line with APA's D.I.A.L Reporting Protocols, Members must promptly report:

- Confidentiality breaches
- Boundary violations
- Online harassment involving clients or professional identity
- Misrepresentation of services
- Ethical concerns related to social media conduct

Reports should be made to your supervisor, and APA.

## 12. Consequences of Non-Compliance

Failure to adhere to this Agreement may result in:

- Mandatory retraining or additional supervision
- Removal of online content
- Sanction or Termination of APA Affiliation
- Reporting to external bodies where required



## Our Focus

### Elevate, Provide, Increase, and Create

**Elevate:** public confidence in the effectiveness and professionalism of the therapeutic community.

**Provide:** the therapeutic community with an ever evolving and enhancing level of support.

**Increase:** the positive awareness and use of therapeutic knowledge for the benefit of everyone.

**Create:** an effective framework for the sustainable and successful development of best practice within the therapeutic community and beyond.

APA BELIEVES THAT EPIC CHALLENGES REQUIRE EPIC SOLUTIONS

A new approach  
for  
new results



## Contact us

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