

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY: USE OF AGENCY MATERIAL FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

School of Social Work, McMaster University

The purpose of field education is to provide students with real life practice experience. Students will be in contact with service users and community groups. They will have access to agency records and possibly research data and they will be exposed to agency materials and processes. They will be bound by all agency policies related to confidentiality. Additionally, the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Guidelines for Ethical Practice (2005)¹ states that field instructors and faculty have:

3.5 Responsibilities to Students In addition to the general provisions of the *Code*, social worker educators and field instructors who supervise students are guided by the following specific ethical responsibilities.

3.5.3 Social workers foster in social work students' knowledge and understanding of the social work profession, the *Code of Ethics* and other appropriate sources of ethical practices.

3.5.4 Social workers instruct students to inform clients of their student status.

3.5.5 Social workers inform students of their ethical responsibilities to agencies, supervisors and clients.

3.5.6 Social workers adhere to the principles of privacy and confidentiality in the supervisory relationship, acknowledging with students any limitations early in the professional relationship.

The CASW Code of Ethics further states that social workers, including students are bound by the following:

1.3 Promote Client Self-Determination and Informed Consent

1.3.4 Social workers, at the earliest opportunity, discuss with clients their rights and responsibilities and provide them with honest and accurate information regarding the following:

- the recording of information and who will have access to such information; and
- the limitations on professional confidentiality (see section 1.5 regarding confidentiality).

1.3.6 Social workers obtain clients' informed consent before audio taping or videotaping clients or permitting observation of services to clients by a third party.

1.5 Protect Privacy and Confidentiality

Social workers respect clients' right to privacy. Social workers do not solicit private information from clients unless it is required to provide services or to conduct social work research. Once information is shared or observed in a professional context, standards of confidentiality apply. Social workers protect clients' identity and only disclose confidential information to other parties (including family members) with the informed consent of clients or the clients' legally authorized

¹ http://casw-acts.ca/sites/default/files/attachements/CASW_Guidelines%20for%20Ethical%20Practice.pdf

representatives, or when required by law or court order. This obligation continues indefinitely after the social worker has ceased contact with the client. The general expectation that social workers will keep information confidential does not apply when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a client or others (see section 1.6 regarding protection of vulnerable members of society). In all instances, social workers disclose the least amount of confidential information necessary to achieve the desired purpose.

1.5.9 Social workers do not disclose identifying information when discussing clients for teaching or training purposes, unless the client has consented to such disclosure.

Therefore:

When students are using material from their placement (including, but not limited to, recordings (digital, video, taped), written (records, letters, email, blog etc.), or verbal descriptions of clients, staff and confidential organizational communications for educational purposes, they should take care to

1. Preserve confidentiality such as changing names and other identifying data.
2. Ensure that the client, community group, research participant or agency staff has been informed about the use of recorded or written material and has provided written consent.
3. Ensure that the field instructor or other agency personnel is informed about the use of recorded or written material for educational purposes
4. Ensure that the written and recorded material is viewed as the property of the agency and may not be retained by the student or the faculty
5. Abide by all agency policies and guidelines related to privacy and confidentiality

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