

TECHNOLOGY, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND DISTANCE COUNSELING CONSIDERATIONS

PREFACE

Technology, social media, and distance counseling are changing the way we communicate and work, offering new models to engage with our clients, evaluatees, colleagues, and the general public. We believe this kind of interaction may:

- enhance and embrace evolving communication styles;
- expedite service provision; and
- reduce and/or eliminate barriers.

Regardless of the technology used or its application, rehabilitation counselors are held to the same level of expected behavior and competence as defined by the *Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors*. They need to be aware of risks and limitations, which may include but are not limited to:

- confidentiality, privacy, and security;
- actual or perceived unethical behavior; and
- inability to establish or maintain good rapport.

This document is designed to assist rehabilitation counselors in developing or refining policies and practices related to technology, social media, and distance counseling. Rehabilitation counselors are encouraged to use this form to assess how their practices align with the following categories and to use findings to enhance their professional disclosure form and practices as well as their social media policy, if they maintain a presence on social media platforms.

TYPES OF TECHNOLOGY USED IN THE PROFESSIONAL SETTING

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Audio/Video Platforms | <input type="checkbox"/> E-mail | <input type="checkbox"/> Text | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cellular Phone | <input type="checkbox"/> Facsimile | <input type="checkbox"/> VoIP | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Applications | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media Platforms | <input type="checkbox"/> Web/Mobile Apps | |

REHABILITATION COUNSELOR COMPETENCE

Rehabilitation counselors understand how:

- to use the specific applications, platforms, or systems in which they engage
- laws governing the practice of counseling across state lines or international boundaries may impact service delivery or access to services
- liability insurance and/or reimbursement sources may limit the types of technology that may be used to provide counseling services
- confidentiality may be limited by the specific application, platform, or system
- to encrypt or secure communications, as necessary to protect confidentiality
 - considerations may include
 - to whom information is being transferred and how
 - the inherent features or limitations of the technology used
 - whether protocols are needed for rehabilitation counselors and clients to verify the identity of the other party

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- to preserve electronic records, doing so in a confidential manner
 - considerations may include
 - whether a record must be maintained
 - the inherent features of the platform used to create a record
 - minimal disclosure requirements
 - the length of time the record must be maintained and when and how it will be destroyed
 - the location and safety of the record
- to assess whether a specific application, platform, or system is appropriate for a client's needs
 - considerations may include
 - application, platform, or system reliability
 - access to technical assistance
 - whether the technology expedites or delays service provision
 - the impact of asynchronous communications
 - alternative and emergency contacts for rehabilitation counselor unavailability
 - whether the technology reduces or eliminates a barrier to access
 - how to address misunderstandings relating from the lack of visual cues and/or voice intonations
- to assess a client's intellectual, emotional, and physical ability to use technology, if technology-assisted services are provided
 - considerations may include
 - the client's understanding of purpose and operation of the technology
 - whether the technology presents a barrier to access
- to provide and what to cover in the informed consent and disclosure process for client's accessing technology-assisted services

INFORMED CONSENT AND DISCLOSURE

Rehabilitation counselors understand that clients have the freedom to choose whether to use technology-based distance counseling within the rehabilitation counseling process. In addition to the usual and customary protocol of informed consent between rehabilitation counselor and client for face-to-face counseling, the following issues, unique to the use of technology-based distance counseling, are addressed in the informed consent process:

- risks and benefits of engaging in the use of technology-based distance counseling
- type of technology, possibility of technology failure, and alternate methods of service delivery
- anticipated response time
- procedures to follow when the rehabilitation counselor is not available
- referral information for client emergencies
- time zone differences
- cultural and/or language differences that may affect the delivery of services
- possible denial of insurance claims and/or benefits
- any limitations due to services provided across jurisdictions
- any policies related to use of social media

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SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Rehabilitation counselors who choose to allow the option of engaging with clients via social media explain the benefits, limitations, and boundaries of the use of social media in the provision of services. When developing a social media policy that is transparent, consistent, and easily understood by clients, rehabilitation counselors consider the following:

- online interactions and boundaries
 - considerations may include
 - the requirement to engage with clients only on social media platforms they maintain for professional use
 - potential benefits of using social media in the provision of services
 - the extent to which and the platforms on which the rehabilitation counselor and client will interact (e.g. friend, fan, follow)
 - the purpose and ways to maintain integrity of the social group
 - ways in which confidentiality of the client-counselor relationship may be compromised by the client's interactions via social media and the extent to which such interactions may become part of the record
 - clarification that public internet sites that permit individuals to provide reviews or ratings of the rehabilitation counselor and/or their business are not requests for testimonials or endorsements
- online consultation
 - considerations may include
 - how personally identifiable information will be protected if the rehabilitation counselor seeks peer consultation via social media platforms
- confidentiality and privacy
 - considerations may include
 - what information may potentially be discussed online
 - whether the client consents to sharing personally identifiable information
 - the requirements that protected or highly sensitive information may not be shared via social media platforms
 - whether a client's virtual presence will be searched online and how this is relevant to service provision
 - how GPS enabled devices may permit others to surmise a client is receiving regular services from a business
 - how system administrators or platform providers may have access to communications
- posting and moderating content
 - considerations may include
 - how content posted on social media platforms is largely permanent and easily shared beyond the privacy settings of any particular platform
 - how they will monitor and remove potentially harmful information on sites they establish for their professional presence
- addressing non-compliance
 - considerations may include
 - actions the rehabilitation counselor will take when clients attempt to interact with the counselor in a manner that is inconsistent with the social media practices of the counselor
 - actions the rehabilitation counselor will take when he/she becomes aware of client actions on social media platforms that may compromise the client's confidential, private, or protected information

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification. (2016). *Technology, Social Media, and Distance Counseling Considerations*. Retrieved from, http://www.crc certification.com/filebin/pdf/CRCC_TechSMDCConsiderations.pdf

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