

PRIVACY POLICY

COUNSELLING AND COACHING SERVICE

STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

The privacy and confidentiality of personal information are core principles at the Counselling and Coaching Service. 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 about how we handle personal information. This document describes our privacy policies.

WHAT IS PERSONAL INFORMATION?

Personal information is a collection of details about an identifiable individual. It includes **physical** characteristics (age, gender, marital status, family background), **contact information** (home address or phone number, e-mail address, etc.), **mental health** details (mental health history, other health conditions, counselling services received), and records on **occupations, 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 contrasts with business information (an individual's business address and telephone number), which is not protected by privacy legislation.

WHO WE ARE

The Counselling and Coaching Service is a unit of the Student Academic Success Service. This unit includes at the time of writing eleven counselors and two support staff. The Counselling Service shares its space with the Office of the Director of the Student Academic Success Service. The Office of the Director includes five employees. These employees, as well as a number of consultants and agencies may, in the course of their duties, have limited access to personal information we hold. But we restrict this access as much as is reasonably possible. We also have their assurance that they follow stringent privacy principles. Other employees like security or computer consultants enter our offices only when our staff are present, and do not see client information. No one else enters our offices outside business hours, except for maintenance staff who, of course, cannot access client information.

WE COLLECT PERSONAL INFORMATION

PRIMARY PURPOSES

Like all university based counselling services, we collect, use and disclose personal information to serve our clients. For our clients, the *primary purpose* behind our collecting personal information is to provide personal counselling/coaching. For example, we gather information about client's mental health history, including their family history, their physical condition and their level of functioning in social situations in order to help us assess what their counselling/coaching needs are, to advise them of their options and then to provide the counseling/coaching to which they have consented.

A **second primary purpose** is to obtain a baseline reference for mental and social functioning so that as we provide counselling/coaching services we can identify changes over time. We rarely collect such information without the client's express consent, but we might do so in an emergency (if the client is unconscious, for instance) or when we believe the client would consent if asked but it is impractical to obtain expressed consent (for example, a family member relays a message from the client and we have no reason to doubt that message).

RELATED AND 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:

- We need to invoice clients for goods or services not paid for at the time.
- We want to advise clients and others of special events or opportunities (a workshop, new program, etc.) we have available.
- We need to review client and other files to ensure we provide high-quality services, including assessing the performance of our staff. In addition, external consultants like auditors and lawyers may on our behalf do audits and quality improvement reviews in our services, including reviewing client files and interviewing our staff.
- The Manager of the Counselling and Coaching Service is a member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario. Counsellors are also registered professionals. Most are members of the College of Registered Psychotherapists. Therefore, these regulatory bodies may inspect our records and interview our staff as a part of their mandate to protect the public interest. In addition, as professionals, we report serious misconduct, incompetence or incapacity of other practitioners, whether they belong to other organizations or our own. Also, our organization believes in notifying authorities about information that suggests serious illegal behavior. External regulators have their own strict privacy obligations. Sometimes these reports include personal information about our clients, or other individuals, to support the concern (e.g., improper services). Also, like all organizations, various government agencies (Information and Privacy Commissioner, Human Rights Commission, etc.) have the power to review our files and interview our staff as a part of their mandates. In these circumstances, we may consult with legal professionals who can investigate matters and report back to us.
- Clients or other individuals we deal with may have questions about the services we have provided. We also deliver services for many of our clients over a period of months or years and our previous records are helpful in these cases. We retain client information for at least ten years

after the last contact so we can respond to those questions and provide these services; note that our regulatory college also requires us to retain our client records.

- You can opt out of some of these related or secondary purposes (for instance, by declining to receive notice of special events or opportunities). We do not, however, have much choice about most other related or secondary purposes like those for external regulation.

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. All of our cell phones are digital, which signals are more difficult to intercept.
- Paper information is transmitted through sealed, addressed envelopes or boxes by reputable companies.
- Electronic information is transmitted either through a direct line or is anonymized or encrypted.
- 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 ten years. Our client and contact directories are much more difficult to systematically destroy, so we remove such information when we can if it does not appear that we will be contacting you again. However, if you ask, we will remove such contact information right away. We destroy paper files containing personal information by shredding. We destroy electronic information by deleting it and, when the hardware is discarded, we ensure that the hard drive is physically destroyed. Alternatively, we may send some, or all, of the client file to our client.

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.

If there is a problem 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?

Our Information Officer, Donald Martin, Manager of the Counselling Service, will attempt to answer any questions or concerns you might have, and can be reached at:

100 Marie Curie., P.O. Box 450,
Station A, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5
PHONE (613) 562-5800, ext. 6885

If you wish to make a formal complaint about our privacy practices, you may make it in writing to our Information Officer. He will acknowledge receipt of your complaint, ensure that it is investigated promptly and that you are provided with a formal decision with reasons.

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 bodies:

THE COLLEGE OF PSYCHOLOGISTS OF ONTARIO
110 Eglinton Ave W., Suite 500
Toronto, ON, M4R 1A3
(416) 961-8817

THE COLLEGE OF REGISTERED PSYCHOTHERAPISTS OF ONTARIO
163 Queen Street East, Fourth Floor
Toronto, ON, M5A 1S1
(416) 874-4079

This policy is made under the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*. That is a complex Act and provides some additional exceptions to the privacy principles that are too detailed to set out here. There are some rare exceptions to the commitments set out above.

For more general inquiries, the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Canada oversees the administration of the privacy legislation in the private sector. The Commissioner also acts as a kind of ombudsman for privacy disputes. The Commissioner can be reached at:

112 KENT STREET, OTTAWA, ONTARIO, K1A 1H3
PHONE (613) 995-8210 **TOLL-FREE** 1-800-282-1376 **FAX** (613) 947-6850 **TTY** (613) 992-9190
www.privcom.gc.ca

INFORMATION ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY

COUNSELLING SERVICE STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS SERVICE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

The Counselling Service has several services available to you. These services include individual counselling, educational and career planning, personal development workshops, interest and personality testing and other specialized programs. The services are provided by qualified professional counsellors and practicum interns. Professional counsellors have obtained either a master's or a doctoral degree in psychology or educational counselling. Practicum interns are supervised closely by experienced professional counsellors.

All interactions with the Counselling Service, including the scheduling of your appointments, your attendance at appointments, the contents of your sessions, your progress in counselling, and your records, are confidential.

We share our office space with the Office of the Director of the Student Academic Success Service who also follow appropriate personal information protection principles.

EXCEPTIONS TO CONFIDENTIALITY:

- The counselling staff works as a team. Your counsellor may consult with other counselling staff to provide the best possible care as well as for professional and training purposes.

Furthermore, disclosure is required by law in situations involving:

- Reasonable grounds to believe that there is a risk of imminent harm to you or specifically identified others and/or the abuse of children.
- Reasonable grounds to believe that a member of a regulated health profession has sexually abused a patient.
- A court order.

Counselling record:

No record of counselling is included in any academic or educational record. Although your counselling record remains the property of the University of Ottawa, you have the right to access the personal information we hold concerning you. You may also request in writing that the Counselling Service release specific information about your counselling to individuals of your choice. We keep our client files for ten years before they are destroyed.

I agree to the Counselling Service collecting, using and disclosing personal information about me as set out above. I acknowledge the limitations concerning confidentiality and accept those limitations.

Student _____

Date _____

Witness _____

CONSENT FORM

Counselling Service SASS

CONSENT FOR TREATMENT AND FOR THE COSTS OF CAREER COUNSELLING SERVICES PROVIDED TO NON-STUDENTS:

I, _____, have requested career counselling from the Counselling Service of the University of Ottawa.

I have been given information about the goals and the methods of the career counselling services proposed to me; I'm also aware of the counsellor's qualifications. In addition, I have received an explanation of the services and the fees involved.

I have received information that my counselling and anything that is said during my sessions will remain confidential; neither will be revealed to anyone outside Counselling Service without my written permission, unless the law requires it.

I know that the law requires the counsellor to reveal information when:

1. there is reasonable suspicion that children are being mistreated or abused
2. a person may become violent with others or with himself or herself
3. there is reason to believe that a professional in a regulated health profession has sexually abused a client or patient.

I agree to take part in the career counselling service and know I can withdraw at any time. As such, I agree to receive the services described below and to pay for them as soon as I receive them. I can cancel a scheduled service or my overall service request as long as I notify Counselling Service in writing or by phone in advance. If ever Counselling Service has to cancel a scheduled service, it will offer it to me at another convenient time in its schedule.

A. Initial interview:

1. Date : _____ Duration : _____ Fees : _____

B. Testing - Psychometric instruments:

1. _____ Fees : _____
2. _____ Fees : _____
3. _____ Fees : _____
4. _____ Fees : _____
5. _____ Fees : _____

C. Interpretation and / or counselling interview:

1. Duration expected: _____ Fees : _____

D. Extra counselling interviews:

1. To be discussed: _____ Fees : _____

I accept the services, fees and all the other conditions of this agreement as described in this document.

Client's signature

Date

The Counselling Service agrees to provide the services described above at the rates listed in this agreement. The counsellor's signature confirms the Counselling Service's commitment.

Counsellor's signature

Date

COUNSELLING CONSENT FORM

Counselling Service STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS SERVICE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

Counselling is a confidential process designed to help you address your concerns, come to a greater understanding of yourself, and learn effective personal and interpersonal coping strategies. It involves a supportive, respectful and understanding relationship between you and a trained counselor who has the desire and willingness to help you accomplish your individual goals.

Counselling involves sharing sensitive, personal, and private information that may, at times, be distressing. During the course of counselling, there may be periods of increased anxiety or confusion. The outcome of counseling is often positive; however, the level of satisfaction for any individual is not predictable.

Some of the potential benefits of counselling include: changes in problematic behavior; the removal or reduction of symptoms; improvements in self-esteem and overall mood; positive change in interpersonal relationships; improved academic success; greater clarity about academic and career plans.

Please feel free to discuss with your counsellor any questions that you may have about the counselling process.

Consultations are confidential and free. A small fee applies to some assessments.

I have read and discussed the above information with my counsellor. I understand the risks and benefits of counselling, and what is expected of me as a client of the Counselling Service. I agree to take part in counselling. I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time.

signature of client

signature of counsellor

date _____

