

## AGC PLLC Social Media Policy

This document outlines my office policies related to the use of Social Media. Please read it to understand how I conduct myself on the Internet as a mental health/Substance Use professional and how you can expect me to respond to various interactions that may occur between us on the Internet. If you have any questions about anything within this document, I encourage you to bring them up when we meet. As new technology develops and the Internet changes, there may be times when I need to update this policy. If I do so, I will notify you in writing of any policy changes, offer a printed copy of the updated policy or you can view it at [www.garrawaycounseling.com](http://www.garrawaycounseling.com).

Some of the relevant ethical codes to consider in my social media policy states:

- Licensed Psychotherapists do not disclose client confidences except by written authorization or waiver, or where mandated or permitted by law.
- Verbal authorization will not be sufficient except in emergency situations unless prohibited by law.
- When providing couple, family, or group treatment, the therapist does not disclose information outside the treatment context without written authorization from each individual competent to execute a waiver.
- In the context of couple, family, or group treatment, the therapist may not reveal any individual's confidences to others in the client unit without the prior written permission of that individual.
- Licensed Psychotherapists are aware of their influential positions with respect to clients, and they avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of such persons. Therapists, therefore, make every effort to avoid conditions and multiple relationships with clients that could impair professional judgment or increase the risk of exploitation. Such relationships include but are not

## AGC PLLC Social Media Policy

limited to, business or close personal relationships with a client or the client's immediate family. When the risk of impairment or exploitation exists due to conditions or multiple roles, therapists take appropriate precautions.

### **E-MAILS, CELL PHONES, COMPUTERS AND FAXES ARE NOT PRIVATE:**

No form of client communication is 100% guaranteed to be private. Conversations can be overheard; e-mails can be sent to the wrong recipients and phone conversations can be listened to by others. But in today's age of Facebook and other social media, psychotherapists must be more aware than ever of the ethical pitfalls they can fall into by using these types of communications. Although they add convenience and expedite communication, it is very important to be aware that computers e-mail, and cell phone communication can be accessed relatively easily by unauthorized people and hence compromise the privacy and confidentiality of such communication. E-mails are vulnerable to such unauthorized access since servers have unlimited and direct access to all e-mails that go through them. Although I am exploring various encryption software programs to protect your privacy, my e-mails and data on my computers may not be encrypted, it is always a possibility that faxes can be sent erroneously to the wrong address, and computers, including laptops, may be stolen. My computers are equipped with a firewall, virus protection, and passwords, and I also password-protect and back up all confidential information from my computers (stored off-site) on a regular basis.

If you need to cancel or change an appointment time, a telephone call or email may get the message to me in a timely manner. Please notify me if you decide to avoid or limit, in any way, the use of e-mails, cell phones (SMS) (text), faxes, or storage of confidential information on computers. If you communicate confidential or private information via SMS (text) or e-mail, I will assume that you have made an informed decision, will view it as your agreement to take the

## AGC PLLC Social Media Policy

risk that such communication may be intercepted, and I will honor your desire to communicate on such matters via e-mail. Please do not use e-mail or faxes for emergencies. Due to computer or network problems, e-mails may not be deliverable, and I may not check my e-mails or faxes daily. Anytime you are in imminent danger of hurting yourself or others, you are directed to call 911 or report to your local emergency room.

At times it may be preferable to use e-mail to arrange or modify appointments. If you e-mail me content related to your therapy sessions, please note that e-mail is not completely secure or confidential. If e-mail communication outside of therapy requires more than 5 minutes of reading and responding to, I may charge for my professional services rendered in 15-minute increments. Please indicate if you intend to pay the surcharges, or I will save it for review during your appointment time. Please do not send forwarded messages regardless of how inspirational they may seem to my professional e-mail address. I use this for work-related issues and do not want to risk viruses spread by forwarded e-mails.

If you choose to communicate with me by e-mail, be aware that all e-mails are retained in the logs of your and my Internet service providers in a hard copy that is maintained in your file. While it is unlikely that someone will be looking at these logs, they are, in theory, available to be read by the system administrator(s) of the Internet service provider. You should also know that any e-mails I receive from you and any responses that I send to you become a part of your legal record and may be revealed in cases where your records are summed by a legal entity.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA SHOULD BE CONSIDERED PUBLIC COMMUNICATION:**

Messaging on Social Networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn is not secure. It could compromise your confidentiality to use Wall postings, @replies, or other means of engaging with me online if we have an already established client/therapist relationship. It may

## AGC PLLC Social Media Policy

also create the possibility that these exchanges become a part of your legal medical record and will need to be documented and archived in your chart. I may not read these messages in a timely fashion. If you need to contact me between sessions, the best way to do so is by phone (704) 830-8060. Or direct e-mail at garrawaya@aol.com is second best for quick, administrative issues such as changing appointment times. See the e-mail section above for more information regarding e-mail interactions.

### **FRIENDING MAY EXPOSE OUR PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP AND UNDERMINE YOUR PRIVACY:**

This social network policy serves as your notification that being lined as friends or contacts on these sites can compromise your confidentiality and our respective privacy. As in any other public context, you have control over your own description of the nature of our acquaintance, if you choose to disclose a professional relationship. For example, if I saw you at church or school and you ignored me, I would follow your lead and do the same. If you introduce me to your friends, I will agree with your description of how you know me. I will not confirm nor deny any professional relationship between myself and clients on any social network sites. I reserve the right to discontinue any social network connection without prior notification, and I encourage you to do the same. I discourage the use of social network sites for any communication about our therapeutic relationship, including scheduling issues, due to the lack of privacy protections. Be mindful that comments made on social media sites are open for others to read. Be appropriate and avoid disclosing revealing any personal information.

In addition, viewing your online activities without your consent and without our explicit arrangement towards a specific purpose could potentially have a negative influence on our working relationship. If there are things from your online life that you wish to share with me,

## AGC PLLC Social Media Policy

please bring them into our sessions where we can view and explore them together, during the therapy hour. My current treatment agreement states that I keep patient information private and do not share it with others unless there is a reason to believe that the patient or another individual is at risk. It is easy to forget that when we type names into a search engine or a field on a social network, we are also sharing information with others. If you have any questions about this, please bring them up when we meet and we can talk more about it.

### **I DO NOT USE SEARCH ENGINES TO LEARN ABOUT YOU:**

It is NOT a regular part of my practice to search for clients on Google, Facebook, or other search engines. Extremely rare exceptions may be made during times of crisis. If I have a reason to suspect that you are in danger and you have not been in touch with me via our usual means (coming to appointments, phone, or email) there might be an instance in which using a search engine (to find you, find someone close to you, or to check on your recent status updates) becomes necessary as part of ensuring your welfare. These are unusual situations and if I ever resort to such means, I will fully document it and discuss it with you when we next meet.

### **FANNING/LIKING MY PROFESSIONAL PAGE MAY IMPLY ENDORSEMENT:**

I keep a Facebook Page for my professional practice to allow people to share my blog posts and practice updates with other Facebook users. All the information shared on this page is available on any website. You are welcome to view my Facebook Page read or share articles posted there, and comment on them. However, referrals from other clients are one of my best sources of business. My website and Facebook Fan page are intended to let others know who I am as a professional and to make it easy to refer those you feel would benefit from my services. I will not confirm nor deny any professional relationship between clients on any social network site. This social media policy was constructed to inform you of the risks involved with

## AGC PLLC Social Media Policy

psychotherapists not using their professional relationships with clients to further their own interests. I will not ask you to “like” my page or endorse me on other business pages. Please note that you should be able to subscribe to the page via RSS without becoming a Fan and without creating a visible, public link to my Page. You are more than welcome to do this.

### **BUSINESS REVIEW SITES ARE INEFFECTIVE PLACES TO VOICE YOUR COMPLAINTS:**

You may find my psychotherapy practice on sites such as Yelp, Healthgrades, Yahoo Local, Bing, or other places that list businesses. Some of these sites include forums in which users rate their providers and add reviews. Many of these sites comb search engines for business listings and automatically add listings regardless of whether the business has added itself to the site. If you should find my listing on any of these sites, please know that my listings are NOT a request for a testimonial, rating, or endorsement from you as my client. Of course, you have a right to express yourself on any site you wish. However, due to confidentiality, I cannot respond to any review on any of these sites whether it is positive or negative. I urge you to protect your own privacy. You should also be aware that if you are using these sites to communicate indirectly with me about your feelings about our work, there is a good possibility that I may never see it.

If we are working together, I hope that you will bring your feelings and reactions to our work directly into the therapy process. This can be an important part of therapy, even if you decide we are not a good fit. None of this is meant to keep you from sharing that you are in therapy with me wherever and with whomever you like. Confidentiality means that I cannot tell people that you are my client, and my client and Ethics Code prohibits me from requesting testimonials. But you are more than welcome to tell anyone you wish that I’m your therapist or how you feel about the treatment I provided you, in any forum of your choosing.

## AGC PLLC Social Media Policy

If you choose to write something on a business review site, I hope you will keep in mind that you may be sharing personally revealing information in a public forum. I urge you to create a pseudonym that is not linked to your regular e-mail address or friend networks for your own privacy and protection.

If you feel I have done something harmful or unethical and you do not feel comfortable discussing it with me, you can always contact the North Carolina Board of Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselors (NCBLCMHC) which oversees licensing, and they will review the services I provide.

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Greensboro, North Carolina 27417  
844-622-3572 or 336-217-6007  
E-mail: [LCMHCinfo@ncblcmhc.org](mailto:LCMHCinfo@ncblcmhc.org)