



MCMASTER UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Confidentiality Agreement for 3D06 and 4D06 Integrative Seminars

Overview: Confidentiality in Practice

A cornerstone of professional social work relationships is confidentiality with respect to all matters associated with professional services to clients. Social workers demonstrate respect for the trust and confidence placed in them by clients, communities and other professionals by protecting the privacy of client information and respecting the client's right to control when or whether this information will be shared with third parties (CASW Code of Ethics, 2005).

In courses such as the 3D06 and 4D06 integrative seminars it is recognized that students participate and learn by discussing their placement and lived experiences. As such, it is important to identify issues of confidentiality that arise in addition to those related to client confidentiality.

This Agreement provides general guidance to students about confidentiality, which students will review with their seminar leaders in class prior to signing.

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Introduction:

As a member of the social work community, I understand that information that I disclose in social work classes or other settings can find its way back to the community, agencies and to service users. It is my responsibility as a social work student to maintain confidentiality in all areas of my practice as outlined below.

In the field and at the agency:

I will comply with the confidentiality policies and protocols at my placement organization, and sign a confidentiality agreement if required by the organization.¹

I will not discuss clients with personnel within the agency except for the purpose of providing client care or service. I will only disclose client information (after discussion with my field instructor) to other parties (including service users' family members) with informed consent from clients, clients' legally authorized representatives, or when required to by law or court order. This does not apply when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable and imminent harm to a client or others. In all instances, I will disclose the least amount of confidential information needed to achieve the desired purpose (CASW Code of Ethics, 2005).

In field placement, I may encounter people I know who are also service users. This could be a family friend, relative or student. If this situation arises I will immediately discuss it

¹ This information should be provided or discussed as part of the placement orientation process provided by the field instructor or designate (e.g., Human Resources).

with my field instructor and/or seminar leader. I agree to follow field instructor/School/agency directives. It is expected that directives in this regard will respond to service users' wishes (that is, if the service user does not want me to be involved in any aspect of service provision to them, I will not be involved). Regardless of the actions followed, I understand that I must protect the client's confidentiality by not sharing any information about them or their relationship with the agency in my own networks, and not sharing anything I know about them from other contexts, with the agency.

In the classroom and in the School of Social Work:

In seminar, I will maintain confidentiality of client information by changing clients' personal identifiers (e.g., names) and other details that could lead to clients being identified, consistent with the "Confidentiality Policy: Use of Agency Material for Educational Purposes" found in the School of Social Work's Field Practice Manual. I understand that seminar is a place to practice professional behaviours and I will ensure to be respectful at all times with my peers and seminar leader. This would include respectful use of language and limiting use of electronic devices in seminar. The specifics will be discussed and agreed upon in each seminar.

In seminar, my peers and I may also share confidential and personal information about ourselves, our placement organizations and field instructors. I understand that it is crucial that this information remain in the classroom to ensure the integrity of my fellow classmates, my seminar leader, the organizations and field instructors. This allows the seminar class to be a safe space for me and other students to explore our concerns and reflections as we continue to develop as social workers. I recognize that the peers in my seminar will eventually be my colleagues in the field and therefore will do my best to present myself and my peers in a respectful and collegial manner. I agree to respect the privileged and confidential nature of the communication between participants in seminar, including the reactions of my classmates and seminar leader.

I appreciate that other participants in class may be familiar with my placement community, agency or field instructor, and I will bear this in mind when discussing matters relating to the field or my personal experience. If I know field instructors or agency personnel where other students in the class are placed, I will disclose this information to the class in order that participants can make informed decisions about what they choose to share.

While those in seminar strive to maintain confidentiality, I appreciate that there is no absolute guarantee that the information I share in class will be kept confidential. I will take this into consideration to make informed decisions about what I choose to share in the classroom. If I am uncertain about whether to share information I will discuss the matter first with my seminar leader to determine if sharing the information in seminar is appropriate.

In the community:

I realize that, in the course of my interactions with others in the community, I may be asked about or have opportunity to speak about my experiences and observations as a student. Examples of these settings include professional training, conferences, community meetings, networking events, association meetings, etc. I agree to always be mindful of confidentiality concerns in my decisions about what to say in such settings.

In the general public:

I understand that any discussion I have in a public setting, including social media, has no guarantee of privacy. Consistent with the guidance provided above and with the “Professional Suitability Policy” and “Policy on Social Media and Use of Electronic Technologies” found in the School of Social Work’s Field Practice Manual, I will not discuss any confidential matters relating to my placement, service users, or seminar when I am in public (e.g., bus stops, restaurants, stores, bars, at home, on a mobile phone, etc.) or on electronic forums (e.g., Facebook groups, personal social media pages, blogs, online shared documents, etc).

I understand the importance of maintaining confidentiality in all aspects of my conduct, in relation to the people who are my clients, colleagues, and teachers. I understand that breaches of confidentiality can be viewed as serious ethical violations and can result in the termination of a field placement and my place in the integrative seminar. I understand that if my placement was terminated for a breach of confidentiality, this could lead to an F, which would make me ineligible to continue in the Social Work program.

* * *

I acknowledge that I have read, have had opportunities to discuss and clarify expectations in class and understand and agree to respect and protect the confidentiality in all areas as outlined above.

I acknowledge that I have read and understand the School’s “Professional Suitability Policy”, “Confidentiality Policy: Use of Agency Material for Educational Purposes”, “Policy on Social Media and Use of Electronic Technologies”, and the CASW Code of Ethics (2005).

1. [POLICY ON SOCIAL MEDIA & USE OF ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGIES](#)
2. [PROFESSIONAL SUITABILITY](#)
3. [CODE OF ETHICS](#)
4. [CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY: USE OF AGENCY MATERIAL FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES](#)

Signatures:

Student: _____ (please print)

_____ (please sign)

Seminar Leader: _____ (please print)

_____ (please sign)

Date: _____