



## Privacy and Confidentiality

### Key Messages

1. Any information released to a third party (e.g., an insurance company) will be clarified and agreed upon prior to its release.
2. All computers used by therapists are password protected and our network is secured.
3. All confidential information not contained in electronic files is shredded.

### Electronic Records

Client records are retained electronically with safeguards that protect the security and confidentiality of the information. Written notes may be captured by your therapist during your session. These notes will be scanned into your file and the paper copy will be shredded. The following protections are in place to secure your information:

- Only authorized users can access identifiable information.
- Password and encryption controls are used.
- Users are uniquely identified.
- Data integrity is protected, and secure back-up and access protocols are in place.
- Electronic data is disposed of in a secure manner disallowing reconstruction.

### Electronic Communication

When obtaining informed consent for electronic provision of services (e.g., telephone, password protected Zoom call), your therapist will include information about:

- Risks (e.g., technical difficulties, misunderstandings due to lack of visual clues).
- Benefits (e.g., distance, convenience, comfort).
- Reasonable alternative service options.
- Privacy limitations (including the possibility of interception of communications) of providing services through the electronic medium/media to be used.

As clinical social workers, we appreciate the trust our clients place in us. Maintaining your privacy and confidentiality is a priority. The Alberta College of Social Workers provides guidelines for their members in their [standards of practice](#). In addition, we are governed by the provincial [Personal Information Protection Act](#) (PIPA), the federal [Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act](#) (PIPEDA) and the [Health Professions Act](#).

### **The key principles relevant to clinical social workers and you as a client are:**

1. The purpose for which the personal information is being collected must be identified during or prior to collection.
2. Information is collected with the knowledge and consent of the individual.
3. The collection of the personal information is limited to what is necessary for the purpose of the visit.
4. Information must be as accurate, complete, and up to date as possible.
5. Information must be protected by adequate safeguards.
6. Information should be accessible for review and corrected by the person to whom the information relates.
7. Information will not be released to anyone without the express, specific consent of the individual to whom the information relates except under the following circumstances:
  - To comply with a subpoena or warrant issued by the court
  - To ensure the safety of an individual. If the therapist has reasonable grounds to believe that a specific person is at risk of harm to self or others, then information can be released without consent.
  - Where the disclosure is required by law. For example, as professionals, it is our responsibility under the Child Welfare Act, if there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a child may be in need of protective services, to promptly report the matter to Children's Services.
  - For the purpose of collecting a debt owed by the individual
8. If the client believes that standards of privacy are not being adhered to, they should first discuss this with the therapist involved. If the issue is not resolved satisfactorily, clients should contact the Alberta College of Social Workers.

### **Maintaining Records and Quality Improvement**

Clinical social workers are required to maintain client files for at least 10 years. In addition, when the client is a minor, the records will be retained for two years after the date the client reaches the age of majority or 10 years, whichever is longer.

Improving the quality of service provided to clients is a priority for River Valley Mental Health Inc. As a result, we may use de-identified client information for research or teaching purposes.