

Donna M. Firer, LCSW - C  
7034 Carroll Avenue, Suite 1  
Takoma Park, Maryland 20912  
(301) 585-8858

[www.donnafirer.net](http://www.donnafirer.net)

### **Communication in the Current World of Technology**

These days, there are so many ways for people to be in touch with each other. My intent is that technologies are used in a way that 1) ensures your privacy and 2) supports our work together. This document describes my current thinking about how to achieve and adhere to these goals. Please read it to understand how I manage the range of communication devices as a behavioral health professional and how you can expect me to respond to various interactions that may occur between us using landlines, Smart Phones and the internet.

I have two primary concerns; 1) your privacy and 2) you receiving proper assurance that I have received any communication you have sent me.

### **SMS/Text Messaging: Not Secure (Sparingly under particular, limited circumstances)**

A screen shot of any SMS/text message can readily be shared to anyone, without your consent. Please do not use mobile phone SMS/text or messaging on any other Social Networking sites to convey any personal information related to our work together. These sites are not secure. Additionally, I may not read these messages in a timely manner.

SMS/text messaging can be useful to communicate only about practical, logistical information with a specific "time stamp". For example, if you find that you are suddenly unable to keep our scheduled appointment or to verify our schedule for that day.

If I am suddenly unable to keep our appointment due to illness or emergency, I will use SMS/text messaging to communicate with you.

SMS/text messaging can be efficient and useful in certain, limited situations. Please be aware that I am not always able to read these messages in a timely manner. If you send me a SMS/text message and do not hear back from me within a short time, please telephone (301)585-8828 or email me at [donnafirerlcsw@gmail.com](mailto:donnafirerlcsw@gmail.com)

### **Email: [donnafirerlcsw@gmail.com](mailto:donnafirerlcsw@gmail.com) (Secure Only through *Protected Trust* Portal)**

Email is not completely secure or confidential if sent through conventional ways, i.e. your personal or work gmail, yahoo, hotmail, etc account. This is not a secure way for communication. I use and will offer you a HIPAA compliant security add-on called **Protected Trust**. This add-on prevents the interruption of information while it is en route along the internet as well as allowing only you to open up the message when it comes into your mailbox. We will set this up early in our work together.

It is my preference that email is used sparingly and primarily for arranging or modifying appointments. An email message should not be considered a substitute for an in session discussion.

All email communication which contains any material related to our clinical work together - that is updates, questions, impressions, etc - are retained in your medical record.

If you are emailing me without use Protected Trust portal, I am not responsible for the confidentiality of the communication. By using an alternate email mechanism, you acknowledge that I am not responsible for the privacy of the information.

### **Email and Telephone Messages From Parents**

If I am working with your child, you know that I welcome brief updates prior to sessions which may impact our work that day. This does not occur frequently but I find it can be a useful way to maintain our teamwork. These types of brief updates are not a substitute for our regular check in appointments which we will schedule as needed throughout the course of the work.

Emails sent the day prior to the appointment via the **Protected Trust** portal and/or phone messages at 301-585-8828 will have the highest likelihood of me seeing/hearing and being able to receive prior to the appointment. While I do my best to read/listen and let you know I received the message, please know that I will not be providing feedback, evaluation, etc. This type of brief update is primarily to advise me if something that you deemed noteworthy occurred during the week between our sessions. It's very important to advise your child that you shared information with me as I will bring this up with them at the beginning of our time together. I will discuss this more fully with both you and your child as we begin our work together.

### **Friending**

I do not accept or contact requests from current or former clients on any social networking site. I believe that adding clients as friends or contacts on these sites can compromise your confidentiality and our respective privacy. It may also blur the boundaries of our professional relationship.

### **Use of Search Engines**

It is not a regular part of my practice to search for clients on Google, e tc. 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) becomes necessary as part of ensuring your welfare. These are unusual situations and if I do use these means, I would fully document this in your record and discuss with you when we next meet.

### **Location Based Services**

If you use location based services on your mobile phone, you may wish to be aware of the privacy issues related to these services. I do not place my practice as a check in location on various sites such as Foursquare, etc. However, if you have GPS tracking enabled on your device, it is possible that others may surmise you are a therapy client. Please be aware of this risk if you are intentionally “checking in” from my office or if you have a passive LBS app enabled on your phone.

### **Contact Between Sessions**

As a sole practitioner, I am not able to provide emergency coverage after hours and on weekends. In the event a mental health emergency arises, call 911 and go to the nearest hospital for assistance. The local Crisis Center can also be a good resource and I can provide you with that information when we speak.

If you need to contact me between sessions the best way to do so is by phone at 301-585-8828. Direct email at [donnafirerlcsw@gmail.com](mailto:donnafirerlcsw@gmail.com) is second best for quick, administrative issues and/or you can send an email message requesting that I check my voice mail to hear a message you have left me. Please read below for more on the use of Email.

Thank you for taking the time to review and discuss this material with me. If you have questions or concerns about any of this, please bring them to my attention so that we can discuss them.

Given the fast pace of our technological world, these policies may change from time to time. When that happens, you can be assured that I will communicate any such changes to you.

Donna M. Firer, LCSW - C  
301-585-8828  
[www.donnafirer.net](http://www.donnafirer.net)