



## COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

### Electronic Communications

Electronic means of communication can be an efficient way to offer services and to make contact between appointments. However, Sarah Schlote wishes to outline the risks and benefits of these methods and to outline her policy for their use, so you can understand our parameters and consent for her to communicate with you via these methods, if you choose. Some risks to electronic communications include the following:

- Video calling services may experience technological glitches, service outages, or experience privacy breaches that are beyond Sarah's control.
- Email and texts can be circulated, forwarded, stored electronically and on paper, and broadcast to unintended recipients.
- Backup copies may exist even after they are sent or the recipient has deleted their copy.
- Employers and online services have a right to inspect email sent through their systems.
- Emails can be used to introduce viruses into computer systems.
- Emails and texts may not be secure, and therefore it is possible that the confidentiality of such communications may be breached by a third party.
- Email/text can be intercepted, altered, forwarded, or used without authorization or detection.
- Written communications can be easily misunderstood or misinterpreted, and could inadvertently lead to distress that Sarah will not be able to address effectively outside of your appointment times.

### Policy Guidelines

Our office cannot guarantee, but will use reasonable means, to maintain security and confidentiality of email information. Sarah and her staff will not be liable for improper disclosure of confidential information that is not caused by intentional misconduct. We kindly ask that you acknowledge and consent to the following conditions.

- Email or text messages sent to Sarah or reception may be documented as part of your service record. Sarah and her staff will not forward client identifiable emails or texts to others outside the practice without your prior written consent, except as authorized or required by law.
- Sarah and her staff do not use texting for communicating directly with clients, students or consultees. For non-urgent matters or questions, please email or call and leave a confidential voicemail. Sarah will not reply to text messages sent to her phone.
- We use an online booking system called OWL Practice, which has the option of sending you reminder emails and text messages for your upcoming appointments. Do not reply to texts or emails sent from OWL Practice as they will not be received.
- Email (or texting) is not appropriate for urgent matters or emergencies. We cannot guarantee that any particular message will be read and responded to within any particular period of time. The same is true for voicemail. In the case of an emergency, please call 911, your local crisis line or go to the nearest hospital.
- Brief emails will only be used for the purposes of sending you invoices, receipts, links, resources or homework/aftercare instructions, or to cancel or reschedule appointments. Please book an appointment to discuss clinical matters and keep emails concise.
- We will email on a regular basis, but there may be exceptions to this. For instance, Sarah and her staff will not check email when out of the office, on vacation or in training.
- There can be server problems or connection issues (such as when someone attempts to send a message from an area with limited or no internet connection or a weak cell phone signal). As a result, sometimes voicemail

or email messages are not delivered. If you do not receive a reply to your message within 48 hours, please try again via a different method.

- We will never distribute your email address to a third party.
- Please use caution when using your employer's computer or your work email address to correspond with Sarah and reception.
- Please inform us if your contact information changes.
- Ordinarily there will be no charge for use of periodic, brief emails. Should a message require a lengthy response, a regular correspondence rate may apply. Rather than paying this fee, you may wish to discuss your questions during your next appointment, where Sarah can address them in a more fulsome way.
- Should email and voicemail begin to be used in a more frequent, intensive way beyond the parameters set out in this policy, Sarah will explore your needs further with you to determine alternative resources or solutions that may be helpful.

### **Social Media Use**

We use social media through professional accounts on Facebook and LinkedIn to connect with colleagues and to share resources and updates that may be of interest to you in your growth. We do not add clients as contacts on social media as a general rule, but you do have the option of following or subscribing to our updates or pages.

### **OWL Practice**

We use a Canadian web-based platform called Owl Practice, designed specifically for psychologists, social workers and psychotherapists working in private practice, for our practice management needs - scheduling, client data management, note-taking and invoicing. All information that is uploaded to Owl Practice, such as service notes and intake forms, is stored on Canadian servers and is compliant with relevant privacy legislation. The account is secured with bank level encryption, customized login pages, usernames and passwords.

### **Virtual Appointments**

Sarah offers the option of doing appointments online by video. One of the advantages of video calls is that they allow for continuity of services and care regardless of distance. Many of the therapeutic approaches Sarah uses can be conducted over video call. However, there are some limitations to be aware of. Some of the approaches Sarah uses cannot be done by video (either at all, or need to be adapted), which is something she will discuss with you. Also, video or phone appointments prevent Sarah from intervening more effectively should you be in a crisis situation, or calls/video connections might drop or the audio/video quality might be poor at times. Sarah will discuss the risks and benefits as they apply to your specific situation to determine if proceeding with virtual services is the right fit for you.

Sarah lives in a remote area that does not have LTE/5G internet or cell service. She is able to provide video calls via WIFI, provided that her signal is not compromised (such as during inclement weather or power outages). Should a virtual appointment be disrupted due to technological issues, Sarah will attempt to log back into the software and call you back. She will also email or call you to check in if she is unsuccessful in reaching you through video. If she is unable to meet you by video for your appointment due to a service or power outage, she will call you from her land line and you can discuss whether to have the appointment by phone or to reschedule if you prefer video. If you are in crisis during a virtual appointment and require stabilization beyond the help that Sarah can provide, she will either encourage you to contact your local crisis or distress line or call 911, or she may do this on your behalf if she is concerned for any risk or harm to yourself or someone else.

The limits of confidentiality that have been outlined in your informed consent form and that Sarah went over with you at the start of your work together still apply to virtual appointments. Sarah has also selected to use secure, encrypted video call services in an attempt to further protect your personal health information. However, it is important that you know that even secure encrypted services can fail at times, and that by proceeding with virtual services you accept the possibility that this could occur, even though reasonable precautions have been taken to safeguard your privacy.

Payment for virtual appointments must be made prior to your appointment. If the appointment is interrupted due to technological issues, Sarah will do her best to resume the call by video or by phone; if this is not possible, Sarah will only charge you for the time spent in the appointment together.

Below are the parameters for services by video:

- Sarah uses Zoom for video appointments and will send you the link prior to your appointment. She uses Doxy.me as a backup video service. Her waiting room is here: <https://doxy.me/sarahschlote>
- Video appointments will not be recorded or shared in any way by either party.
- When you connect for an online appointment, please ensure that you are in a private location where other people are not around and confidentiality can be maintained. If you would like to invite another person to be part of your appointment, please discuss with Sarah in advance.
- It is understood that any internet-based communication is not 100% guaranteed to be secure/confidential, even when using software that is represented as compliant with all applicable privacy legislation.
- It is understood that virtual appointments are not primary interventions for situation of crisis or immediate risk, and that in these situations clients are to connect with their local crisis line or emergency services

**Consent and Agreement**

I understand that Sarah and her staff accept no liability for any breach in privacy or confidentiality caused by myself or any third party, or for any interference with or damage to my computer system, software or data occurring in connection with my use of insecure /unencrypted email or video software to communicate with Sarah or her staff.

I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand this consent form. I understand the risks associated with the use of these methods of communication and agree to abide by the parameters outlined in this communications policy.

Client name: \_\_\_\_\_

Client signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_