



# Let Your Voice Be Heard Using Social Media

During this election cycle the easiest, fastest and most efficient way to stay-up-to-date with your elected officials and those running for elective office is through social media! On each individual's social media account you will be able to read their views on certain issues and view any events (town halls, tele-town halls, debates, fundraising events, etc.) that they will be holding or attending. In addition you will be able to communicate directly with your elected official through their social media accounts.

In order to follow and communicate with your representatives you will first need to set up a social media account. The three main accounts that elected officials use are:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram

Creating your own accounts on these various social media platforms is very easy. You simply go to the respected platforms and enter basic biographical information (name, age, birthplace, current location, etc.). Once you have completed these simple tasks you will then be able to keep up with all relevant election information for your elected official(s)!

Sometimes people ask, "Does my elected official really care about what I write on social media?" and the answer to this is YES! According to a report from the Congressional Management Foundation, 45 out of 100 congressional communication staffers said that their office and their boss will take notice of an issue raised by constituents if said issue gets anywhere from ten to thirty comments on their respected social media accounts. This election cycle utilize social media and let your voice be heard!



# Social Media: an Ethics Tip Sheet for Professional Counselors

There are a number of reasons counselors may choose to utilize social media. It may be a way for potential clients to find out about counselors practice, increase referrals from other professionals, and can give one more visibility within the profession. It could also aid in promoting the practice of counseling and allow counselors to participate in discussions about mental health and counseling online. Some counselors might only want to use social media for personal reasons, such as keeping up with family and entertainment. Other counselors might use dating apps to meet potential romantic partners.

The 2014 *ACA Code of Ethics* was the first iteration to offer guidance on social media, as part of an entirely new section, Section H: Distance Counseling, Technology and Social Media. This tip sheet aims to give counselors guidelines so they can ethically utilize social media.

## Top 3 Ethical Issues Counselors Should Keep in Mind When Using Social Media:

1. Personal and professional social media accounts should be separate (H.6.a.)
  - Don't friend, add, connect, tweet, snap, or slide into Direct Messages with your clients, personal virtual relationships with current clients are prohibited (A.5.e). If you don't know what those terms mean see #2.
  - Social media romances are treated the same as in-person affairs, so a big N-O with current clients, and their family members and same goes for former clients, for at least 5 years post-treatment (A.5.).
2. Competence is key! (H.1.a.)
  - If you are going to use social media, whether for professional or personal reasons, you need to understand how the platforms you utilize work and keep abreast of any changes in the account settings, rules and policies established by social media platforms.
  - Don't disclose confidential information through public social media (H.6.d.) and think about how you share information in private social media/closed groups. You may think only other professionals are looking, but you could be mistaken. This includes other people's private information without their express authorization and permission.
  - Don't diagnose people, public figures, or otherwise, in social media posts.
  - If you wouldn't say it to a client or another counselor in real life, don't post it online. Your statements have weight (C.6.c). You should consider the potential ramifications not sharing your values and beliefs online, as anything shared could find its way back to client, employers, associations, counseling education programs, and other professionals.
3. Develop a social media policy and make it known (H.6.b.)
  - Think about potential liabilities when using social media and consider how you might adjust settings to mitigate these (e.g. turning off comments on posts, disallowing direct messages).
  - Advertising/promotion ethical standards apply to social media too (C.3.).
  - Don't check out your client's social media profiles without their permission...even if they are public (H.6.c.).
  - It is essential that counselors and organizations develop a social media policy and include information about this policy on their professional social pages and websites, as well as in their informed consent documents for clients (A.2.b., H.6.b).
  - This policy should cover the risks, especially to confidentiality, and benefits of interacting with you on social media, and the expectations clients can have if they interact with your page.

### **The Bottom-line...**

The main thing to remember when developing policies and deciding how you will engage with social media: clients' welfare is vital (A.1.a.). Consider the implication of your social media presence. What do you hope to gain from your professional presence? What about personal use? And how will you utilize the account settings on each of these platforms to achieve those ends in ways that benefit your clients? If you don't feel comfortable using social media, don't use it.