

Amanda Hon, MA

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Digital Policy ¹

This document is for the benefit of my psychotherapy patients/clients and supervisees.

Although therapists are trained to keep their personal lives out of the consulting room, the availability of information about us on the internet means that this can no longer be guaranteed, virtually at least.

This document acknowledges the complex world of digital media and tries its best to address issues that may impact the therapeutic relationship. I am open to changing my positions on it. In the meantime, I ask all my patients and supervisees to read through this document so they can be familiar with these positions.

Keeping 'Boundaries':

The nature of an online presence can blur interpersonal boundaries, so it is important to be as clear as possible about how boundaries may be challenged in an online environment. As a general rule, I like to keep clinical work in the consultation room as much as possible. However, the nature of the digital world can sometimes stretch these boundaries, so I offer the best clarity I can below.

E-mail:

I am not currently using an e-mail encryption programme, so any e-mails we send to each other may be vulnerable to viruses or human error. For this reason, it is best to be thoughtful about what you include in e-mails to me, and which e-mail address you choose to use with me. Often, it is best to rely on e-mail for non-confidential communications such as setting up appointment times and things like that. In an effort to keep confidential and psychological material 'in the room' it is best to avoid this in e-mails unless we discuss it beforehand. I will ask for your preferred e-mail address at our first session.

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If you choose to communicate with me by e-mail, be aware that all e-mails are retained in the logs of Internet Service Providers. Furthermore, they can be vulnerable to viruses and unintended forwarding or replication. If you are concerned about the confidentiality of your e-mails, you may wish to contact me by telephone instead.

E-invoicing:

For long-term work I invoice at the end of each month. If you would prefer not to receive my invoices by e-mail to your chosen e-mail address, please let me know and I can provide you with a printed copy.

Text messages:

You may send me a text message to alert me if you are running late for a session or for similar reasons. However, text messages are generally not the best method for communicating with me about more important matters, so in that case, please do call and leave me a message.

Telephone and Skype:

While I do not generally run my practice remotely, there may be times when we have a session by telephone, Skype or FaceTime, for example if either one of us is abroad. Any sessions of this type will be discussed and agreed in advance. Please be aware that while I make every effort to maintain confidentiality, applications like Skype are not confidential channels of communication, and though it is highly unlikely, they can be compromised. For this reason I may request we use a different application like VSee or Facetime. When communicating in any of these ways, we both agree not to use any recording devices for remote sessions.

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Google:

While I acknowledge that Googling others is now a generally accepted aspect of daily life, I wish to avoid encountering information about my patients/clients/supervisees that does not come directly from them, so in general practice I do not Google before meeting someone new. It is, of course, your right to Google me. If, in your search, some questions are raised, I would ask that you raise them with me at the earliest opportunity.

Our fast-changing world:

This is the first version of my digital policy. As this world is changing so rapidly, I will update it as I learn more, and would appreciate your honesty and input along the way. Should you have any questions or suggestions, please do let me know.

¹ I am grateful to Dr. Aaron Balick who allowed me to use his policy as a model for this one.