

Confidentiality Statement

What is confidential information?

To a psychologist, confidential information is any information that is revealed by or obtained from a client. In most cases, psychologists cannot disclose whether or not a person is a client or even whether a person came in for an appointment or not, without that person's informed, written consent.

Who is a client?

A client is a receiver of psychological services. At the Counseling Center our clients are primarily UCM students who receive professional services from us.

Why protect confidential information?

Psychologists have an ethical and legal obligation to protect the confidentiality of clients. We strive to establish relationships of trust with those with whom we work. In our professional actions, we protect the welfare and rights of our clients and take care to do no harm.

Although the situation is improving, there continues to be a stigma associated with seeking the services of a psychologist. Some people may be embarrassed about asking for help or of being seen as "weak", "crazy", or "defective". There also may be real risks involved. For example, there are people who have been discriminated against by employers or insurance companies for seeking therapy. Therefore, disclosure of confidential information may cause harm to clients.

Therapy is meant to be a safe place for people to address concerns they may not be able to voice elsewhere. Clients must believe that they can speak openly and honestly with their psychologist in order for therapy to be effective. Many people would not seek out therapy if they thought their private information might be shared with others.

How is confidential information protected?

Psychologists take reasonable precautions to protect confidential information. For example, at the Counseling Center, client records are kept separate from other UCM records. They are kept behind locked doors and access is limited to Counseling Center staff.

When can psychologists disclose confidential information?

Psychologists disclose confidential information only under two (2) conditions:

1. Psychologists may disclose confidential information only with the informed, written consent of the client. The psychologist will try to ensure that the client understands what the consequences might be if confidential information is disclosed to others. If the client seems to fully understand the implications of disclosure and decides to consent, the client will sign a formal authorization form allowing specific information to be shared with designated others.
2. Psychologists disclose confidential information without informed, written consent only as mandated by state law. In Missouri, this includes:
 - (a) When, in the professional opinion of the psychologist, disclosure is necessary to protect against an imminent or likely risk of serious harm to self or others.
 - (b) When there is a court order.
 - (c) When there is suspicion of abuse of children or vulnerable adults.

How does this work within an institution like UCM?

As psychologists, we understand that our professional judgements and actions affect the lives of others. Therefore, we are constantly on the alert for personal, financial, social, organizational, and political factors that might not be in the best interest of our clients. We avoid taking on roles or entering multiple relationships that might (1) impair our objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in delivering services to our clients or (2) expose our clients to harm or exploitation.

If the demands of an organization conflict with the ethical guidelines for confidentiality, we attempt to resolve the conflict in a way that permits adherence to our Ethics Code.

References:

1. American Psychological Association Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct
2. Missouri State Committee of Psychologists Psychology Practice Act and Rules