



Social Media: An Ethics Tip Sheet for Professional Counselors

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 on how to ethically utilize social media.

1. Make sure your professional social media accounts are separate from your personal accounts. It's a good idea to keep your personal accounts private (*ACA Code of Ethics H.6.a.*).
2. Learn everything you can about social media. Be sure you understand the various platforms' purposes and operations, including their privacy controls (H.1.a.).
3. Don't share confidential information on social media, even in closed/private settings. Non-professionals may have access to that information (H.6.d.).
4. Don't diagnose individuals in social media posts, even if they are public figures.
5. If you wouldn't say it in real life, don't post it online. Your statements have weight (C.6.c.). Keep in mind that values and beliefs shared online can make their way to clients, employers, counseling education programs, membership organizations, and other professionals.
6. Be accurate and appropriate in the portrayal of your education, licensure, accreditation, expertise, and memberships. The ACA advertising/promotion ethical standards also apply to social media (C.3.).
7. Don't check out a client's social media profile without permission, even if it is public (H.6.c.). Keep in mind that personal virtual relationships with current clients are prohibited (A.5.e.).
8. Counselors and counseling-related organizations must develop a social media policy. Information about this policy must be included in informed consent documents for clients and should be posted on professional social media pages and websites (A.2.b.).
9. Social media policies should cover the risks, especially to confidentiality, and the benefits of interacting with counselors on social media, as well as the expectations clients should have when interacting with a counselor's professional social media account (H.6.b.).
10. Become familiar with—and follow—all of the social media guidelines listed in the 2014 ACA *Code of Ethics*.