

Relationships Australia Canberra & Region

Privacy and Confidentiality

Relationships Australia Canberra & Region understands that privacy and confidentiality are of the upmost importance in providing effective and responsible services.

Collecting Information about you

To provide an effective service to you, we collect and record personal information from you that is relevant to your current situation. We only collect information that is necessary to provide an effective and responsible service for the help you need. We gather this information from you at different points while you are receiving our services. We may also gather information about you for program evaluation purposes. We will seek further consent if we need to collect personal information about you or your family using methods of audio or video recording. We will also seek valid consent before collecting personal information about those for whom you are responsible (such as your children). Sometimes we also collect information or record details about you because a funding agency requires this information for their records of our service provision.

You do not have to give all of your personal information or you may want to remain anonymous. However, if you do want to withhold information, then some services cannot be provided to you, or a limited service may be provided (due to the lack of, or missing, information). Your practitioner will advise which services cannot proceed without you identifying yourself.

Keeping Information about you

Information is kept on file so we can maintain an accurate record of what services we provide to you. All information we collect from you is stored in physically and/or electronically secure places. We take these responsibilities seriously and adhere to Australian Privacy Principles. Our staff can provide more details about the ways we secure your records.

Using Personal Information

We will only use personal information for the purpose for which it is gathered, and other lawful uses including service management, monitoring of service usage and clinical audit or educational purposes. To contribute to the quality of services, we sometimes use contractors or join in partnerships with other organisations to independently evaluate our services. We ensure they comply with our confidentiality and privacy policies. In these projects we will protect privacy by using anonymous personal information (identifying details are removed). Where this is not possible we will seek your informed consent before using identifiable information.

Using Information for Teaching or Training

We may also use personal information to assist in the professional development of our staff. For example, we may ask you about having staff or students sit in on sessions with you or consenting for others to watch videos or read transcripts of sessions involving you.

We will always explain these training purposes to you and get your prior informed consent before using personal information in this way unless we can be sure to protect your privacy by de-identifying you (identifying details are removed). Anyone who accesses personal information about you will be bound by our oath of confidentiality.

Access to information

Information about you can only be viewed by authorised persons and all Relationships Australia staff sign an oath of confidentiality. As a client, you may access information about you kept on file, unless it would be inappropriate to do so. Examples of inappropriate access may be where:

- other parties in the information do not or cannot consent to access;
- it would have an unreasonable impact upon the privacy of other individuals;
- access may result in a threat to life or harm to health; and/or
- the relevant legislation demands otherwise.

Your practitioner can discuss with you appropriate access and procedures.

Confidentiality under the Family Law Act (1975)

Many of our services are protected as confidential under the Family Law Act (1975), and subsequent amendments. This means that within the limits listed in the section '*Confidentiality and its Limits*' evidence of anything said in a session provided under this Act cannot be admitted as evidence in any family court matter.

Confidentiality and its Limits

Our practitioners are committed to providing you with a confidential service. All personal information gathered during the provision of the service will remain confidential except where there are legal obligations or safety concerns. Specifically confidentiality is not maintained if:

- your service file is subpoenaed by a court, (but see *Confidentiality under the Family Law Act (1975)*);
- failure to disclose the information would place you or another person at serious and imminent risk;
- your prior approval has been obtained to discuss the material with another person (for example, a parent or employer); and/or
- disclosure is otherwise required or authorised by law, particularly regarding the safety and wellbeing of children (see Safety and Wellbeing of People at risk of Harm).

Safety and Wellbeing of People at Risk of Harm

We promote the safety and wellbeing of people at risk of harm. This includes vulnerable adults, young people, children, unborn children, and their families. We also follow the Children and Young persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 NSW and the Children and Young People Act 2008 (ACT). This means we work closely with other organisations to provide integrated and coordinated support for individuals and families. We may be allowed or required by law to share information with another organisation. We only do this to protect the safety and wellbeing of people at risk of harm or to provide better services. If we do this about you, we will seek your informed consent whenever possible, unless it is unsafe to do so. If we ask you for your informed consent but you refuse to provide it, then we still may be required or allowed by law to share the information. We will only share information about you if not sharing would mean that a person would be at risk of harm or pose a risk to their own safety or to public safety.

Concerns about privacy

If you have a concern about the management of your personal information, please inform the relevant Practice Manager. This person's name can be obtained from reception. Upon request you can obtain a copy of the Australian Privacy Principles, which describe your rights and how your information should be handled. Ultimately, if you wish to lodge a formal complaint about the use of, or access to, your personal information, you may do so with the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner by calling 1300 363 992 or send your complaint via email to enquiries@oaic.gov.au or in writing to GPO Box 5218, Sydney, NSW 2001.

Provision of Information to Funding Bodies

Many Relationships Australia Canberra & Region services are funded or subsidised by the federal Government, the ACT Government or the NSW Government.

The provision of services funded through these funding bodies is reliant on the reports and analysis of the effectiveness of our services. We therefore regularly provide data in relation to the service we provide to you to the relevant funding body. Also, funding bodies may sometimes request or even require us to provide information about service use for statistical or research purposes, as a condition of their funding. We will provide information in accordance with contracts set out by funding bodies. Your practitioner can advise if information is provided to funding bodies and, if so, what information is provided. We will always protect your privacy whenever we can.