

Social Media Usage Policy

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College of
Midwives
of Alberta

Preamble

The proliferation of **social media** and online networking forums raises ethical and professional considerations for midwives. While the subject of **professional boundaries** is not new, applying parameters of professional distance and respect in the era of digital connectivity is an emerging concept with its own unique challenges, particularly in the face of rapidly changing online technologies. The use of **social media** necessitates applying proper skills and judgment because there is no clear divide between a personal and professional presence online.

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines and expectations for online conduct. **Social media** and online networking technologies should be treated as virtual public spaces, used by millions and potentially accessible by all. These sites allow people to connect, interact, and share information over the internet through portals such as social networking sites, media-sharing sites, blogs, online forums, wikis, text messaging and multi-media messaging.

Definitions

Client: A person who contracts with the midwife or group of midwives for the professional service of midwifery care. **Client** includes the newborn infant of the parent/person who holds the midwifery contract.

Professional Boundaries: An accepted social, physical and/or psychological space between people that clarifies their respective roles and expectations. **Professional boundaries** create an appropriate **therapeutic relationship** between the midwife and the **client**.

Social Media: Websites and applications that allow users to connect and socialize online. Users may create content and share ideas, thoughts, and information. This includes (but is not limited to) platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and blogging sites.

Therapeutic Relationship: A planned, goal directed, interpersonal process occurring between the midwife and **client** that is established for the advancement of **client** values, interests, and the promotion of **client** health and well-being.

Unprofessional Conduct: Means one or more of the following, whether or not it is disgraceful or dishonourable (HPA s.1(pp)(i-xii)):

- I. Displaying a lack of knowledge of or lack of skill or judgment in the provision of professional services;

119E, 1144 29th Ave NE
Calgary, AB T2E 7P1

www.albertamidwives.org
info@albertamidwives.org

Phone: 1 (403) 474-3999
Fax: 1 (403) 474-3990

- II. Contravention of the *Health Professions Act, the Midwives Profession Regulation, Standards of Practice for Midwives in Alberta, Alberta Competencies for Midwives, and/or* the CMA Code of Ethics;
- III. Contravention of another enactment that applies to the profession.

Client Privacy

Midwives are responsible for ensuring that their practice follows provincial and federal privacy laws, such as the Alberta Health Information Act (HIA) and the Alberta Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA), and should conduct themselves in a way that demonstrates the integrity of the profession.

Midwives shall at all times protect and maintain the confidentiality of **client** personal information consistent with the CMA Standard of Practice and Code of Ethics. In addition, each midwifery practice should develop a clear, written protocol on the use of **social media** and ensure all midwives and office staff are aware of the protocol.

Midwives have the professional and ethical responsibility to ensure that both they and their staff exercise care in the collection, use and disclosure of **clients'** personal information, regardless of format. In **social media** usage, they must also consider the professional, legal and ethical risks and liabilities of using online networking to connect, interact and share information over the internet.

Midwives should be aware that all means of electronic communication/ information can be retrieved and can be used in a court of law even when it has long been deleted. When participating in **social media** sites or online networking forums and blogs, midwives must protect against any possibility that their **clients'** personal information could be revealed and consider any situation where their professional integrity and reputation could be undermined.

In any **social media** usage, midwives should:

- Read, understand, and use the strictest privacy settings to maintain control over access to personal information. Be aware that privacy settings are imperfect, can be compromised, and may change over time.
- Obtain a **client's** written permission prior to posting any personal information about them online.
- Obtain a **client's** written permission prior to taking photographs which are intended for posting online.

- Treat social networking sites as virtual public spaces, accessible by the public. Avoid any discussion or comment with or about **clients** or care-related events. Even without identifiers, descriptions of real case examples could compromise **client** privacy and confidentiality and could reasonably be seen as breaching **client** confidentiality.
- Exercise professional restraint in accessing client information through **social media**. Carefully manage **client** information acquired from legitimate health care related online sites or other sources.
- Avoid the perception of establishing an online **therapeutic relationship** through the posting of midwifery advice directed to an individual within a public discussion on the internet.
- Consider whether any postings on the internet could violate defamation, copyright or plagiarism laws.

Professionalism

Midwives shall not engage in any professional activity that would adversely affect the honour, dignity, or credibility of the profession. Midwives should exercise caution when posting items on **social media** that may inadvertently undermine their professional integrity. Midwives are responsible for their online presence and the content of their communications, and should avoid including derogatory comments against colleagues, employers, **clients**, or practice settings.

Maintaining professionalism is especially important when online credentials indicate the person is a midwife. Midwives should think before using a professional title or initials or making reference to being a midwife when presenting personal views, including those unrelated to the profession or those that could affect the public's trust in the profession.

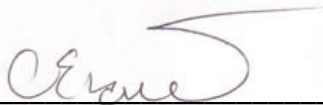
As a professional, employers, **clients** and the public rely on a midwife's expertise to provide accurate information. Any health information communicated through **social media** should always be evidence informed. When a professional includes hyperlinks to other information and resources (e.g., websites, videos, podcasts, etc.), all information should be current, accurate, and reliable.

Inappropriate use of **social media** can compromise public safety and trust in the midwifery profession and may result in allegations of **unprofessional conduct**.

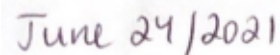
Professional and Personal Boundaries

Midwives must also maintain **professional boundaries** to protect the **client**-midwife relationship. Inappropriate use of **social media** may jeopardize the midwife's ability to preserve the trust and respect required for a **therapeutic relationship**. To avoid this, midwives should:

- Discuss with **clients** that **social media** is not an appropriate forum to discuss personal health information, including clinical and time-sensitive matters. When appropriate, information may be texted, but should remain excluded from all **social media** messaging systems.
- Avoid entering into dual relationships with clients. For example, midwives should decline "friend" or "follow" requests from current **clients** or their family on **social media** platforms while a **client** is under their care.
- Review professional boundary guidelines when considering friend requests from former **clients**.
- Decline giving out their home address to **clients**.



Cassie Evans RM, President
College of Midwives of Alberta



Date

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