

Privacy Policy

Privacy of personal information is an important principle to the Parent Education Resource Centre/Sara Dimerman and Assoc. We are committed to collecting, using and disclosing personal information responsibly and only to the extent necessary for the goods and services we provide. We also try to be open and transparent as to how we handle personal information. This document describes our privacy policies.

WHAT IS PERSONAL INFORMATION?

Personal information is information about an identifiable individual. Personal information includes information that relates to: an individual's *personal characteristics* (e.g., gender, age, income, home address or phone number, ethnic background, family status); *health* (e.g., health history, health conditions, health services received by them); or, *activities and views* (e.g., religion, politics, opinions expressed by an individual, an opinion or evaluation of an individual). Personal information is different from business information (e.g., an individual's business address and telephone number). This is not protected by privacy legislation.

WHO WE ARE

Our organization, Parent Education Resource Centre and Sara Dimerman and Assoc., includes at the time of writing a Psychologist and Art Therapist/Registered Psychotherapist. There are a number of other counselling professionals who see their clients out of our office too who have established their own guidelines.

WE COLLECT PERSONAL INFORMATION: PRIMARY PURPOSES

About Clients

Like all Psychologists/Registered Psychotherapists, we collect, use and disclose personal information in order to serve our clients. For our clients, the primary purpose for collecting personal information is to provide counselling. For example, we collect information about a client's health history, including their family history, physical condition and function and social situation in order to help us assess what their health needs are, to advise them of their options and then to provide the health care they choose to have. A second primary purpose is to obtain a baseline of health and social information so that in providing ongoing health services we can identify changes that occur over time. It would be rare for us to collect such information without the client's express consent, but this might occur in an emergency (e.g., the client is unconscious) or where we believe the client would consent if asked and it is impractical to obtain consent (e.g., a family member passing a message on from our client and we have no reason to believe that the message is not genuine).

About Members of the General Public

For members of the general public, our primary purposes for collecting personal information are to provide notice of special events (e.g., a seminar or conference) or to make them aware of counselling/educational services in general or our clinic in particular. For example, while we try to use work contact or cell phone information where possible, we might collect home addresses and email addresses. We try to obtain consent before using any such personal information, but where this is not, for any reason, possible, we will upon request immediately remove any personal information from our distribution list.

On our website, www.helpmesara.com, we only collect, with the exception of cookies, the personal information you provide and only use that information for the purpose you gave it to us (e.g., to respond to your email message, to register for a course, to subscribe to our newsletter). Cookies are only used to help you navigate our website and are not used to monitor you.

WE COLLECT PERSONAL INFORMATION: RELATED AND SECONDARY PURPOSES

Like most organizations, we also collect, use and disclose information for purposes related to or secondary to our primary purposes. The most common examples of our related and secondary purposes are as follows:

- ❑ To invoice clients for goods or services that were not paid for at the time, to process credit card payments or to collect unpaid accounts.
- ❑ To advise clients and others of special events or opportunities (e.g., a seminar, development of a new service, arrival of a new product) that we have available.
- ❑ Our clinic reviews client and other files for the purpose of ensuring that we provide high quality services, including assessing the performance of our staff. In addition, external consultants (e.g., auditors, lawyers, practice consultants, voluntary accreditation programs) may on our behalf do audits and continuing quality improvement reviews of our Clinic, including reviewing client files and interviewing our staff.
- ❑ Psychologists and Psychotherapists are regulated by the College of Psychologists of Ontario and College of Psychotherapists of Ontario who may inspect our records and interview our staff as a part of their regulatory activities in the public interest. In addition, as professionals, we will report serious misconduct, incompetence or incapacity of other practitioners, whether they belong to other organizations or our own. Also, our organization believes that it should report information suggesting serious illegal behaviour to the authorities. External regulators have their own strict privacy obligations. Sometimes these reports include personal information about our clients, or other individuals, to support the concern (e.g., improper services). Also, like all organizations, various government agencies (e.g., Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, Information and Privacy Commissioner, Human Rights Commission, etc.) have the authority to review our files and interview our staff as a part of their mandates. In these circumstances, we may consult with professionals (e.g., lawyers, accountants) who will investigate the matter and report back to us.
- ❑ The cost of some goods/services provided by the organization to clients is paid for by third parties (e.g. private insurance,). These third-party payers often have your consent or legislative authority to direct us to collect and disclose to them certain information in order to demonstrate client entitlement to this funding.
- ❑ Clients or other individuals we deal with may have questions about our goods or services after they have been received. We also provide ongoing services for many of our clients over a period of months or years for which our previous records are helpful. We retain our client information for a minimum of ten years after the last contact or 10 years beyond an adolescent's 18th birthday to enable us to respond to those questions and provide these services (our regulatory College also requires us to retain our client records).

PROTECTING PERSONAL INFORMATION

We understand the importance of protecting personal information. For that reason, we have taken the following steps:

- ❑ Paper information is either under supervision or secured in a locked or restricted area.
- ❑ Electronic hardware is either under supervision or secured in a locked or restricted area at all times. In addition, passwords are used on computers. All of our cell phones are digital as these signals are more difficult to intercept.
- ❑ Paper information is transmitted through sealed, addressed envelopes or boxes by reputable companies.

- ❑ Electronic information is transmitted either through a direct line or has identifiers removed or is encrypted.
- ❑ Staff are trained to collect, use and disclose personal information only as necessary to fulfil their duties and in accordance with our privacy policy.
- ❑ External consultants and agencies with access to personal information must enter into privacy agreements with us.

RETENTION AND DESTRUCTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION

We need to retain personal information for some time to ensure that we can answer any questions you might have about the services provided and for our own accountability to external regulatory bodies. However, we do not want to keep personal information too long in order to protect your privacy.

We keep our client files for about ten years. We destroy paper files containing personal information by shredding. We destroy electronic information by deleting it and, when the hardware is discarded, we ensure that the hard drive is physically destroyed. Alternatively, we may send some or all of the client file to our client.

YOU CAN LOOK AT YOUR INFORMATION

With only a few exceptions, you have the right to see what personal information we hold about you. Often all you have to do is ask. We can help you identify what records we might have about you. We will also try to help you understand any information you do not understand (e.g., short forms, technical language, etc.). We will need to confirm your identity, if we do not know you, before providing you with this access. We reserve the right to charge a nominal fee for such requests.

If there is a problem we may ask you to put your request in writing. If we cannot give you access, we will tell you within 30 days if at all possible and tell you the reason, as best we can, as to why we cannot give you access.

If you believe there is a mistake in the information, you have the right to ask for it to be corrected. This applies to factual information and not to any professional opinions we may have formed. We may ask you to provide documentation that our files are wrong. Where we agree that we made a mistake, we will make the correction and notify anyone to whom we sent this information. If we do not agree that we have made a mistake, we will still agree to include in our file a brief statement from you on the point and we will forward that statement to anyone else who received the earlier information.

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION?

Our Information Officer, Sara Dimerman, can be reached at:

300 John Street, Suite 320, Thornhill, Ontario L3T 4V5
PHONE 905 882 7690

She will attempt to answer any questions or concerns you might have.

If you wish to make a formal complaint about our privacy practices, you may make it in writing to our Information Officer. She will acknowledge receipt of your complaint, ensure that it is investigated promptly and that you are provided with a formal written decision with reasons.

If you have a concern about the professionalism or competence of our services or the mental or physical capacity of any of our professional staff we would ask you to discuss those concerns with us. However, if we cannot satisfy your concerns, you are entitled to complain to our regulatory bodies ie governing colleges

This policy is made under the Personal Health Information Protection Act.

For more general inquiries, the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario oversees the administration of the privacy legislation. The Commissioner also acts as a kind of ombudsman for privacy disputes. The Information and Privacy Commissioner can be reached at:

Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario
2 Bloor Street East, Suite 1400
Toronto, Ontario M4W 1A8
Phone (416) 326-3333 | 800-387-0073 | Fax (416) 325-9195 | TTY (416) 325-7539
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