

MFT Program Policy on Security, Privacy, and Confidential Material

Policy Availability

This policy is available to the public via the link to [Program Handbook and Policies](#) on the [MFT website](#).

Policies and Procedures for Maintaining Security, Privacy, and Confidentiality

The MFT Program and FamilyWorks are guided by [AAMFT's Code of Ethics](#) and [Georgia statutes](#), which establish safeguards concerning therapists' and clients' clinical activities, case records, and any additional forms of information created while affiliated with the clinic. Therapists must abide by the Code and Georgia statutes at all times.

The following procedures are followed to assure client confidentiality at FamilyWorks:

- All clients must be informed of the confidentiality policies (including limits to confidentiality) at the beginning of the first session.
- *A Therapy Agreement & Informed Consent*, the form that outlines confidentiality policies must be signed before therapy can begin. Once signed and dated, the form is to be retained in each client file.
- In the absence of a release of information, no client information of any kind can be shared with a third party as set forth in the *Therapy Agreement & Informed Consent*.
- Discussions about clients and cases must be restricted to closed session rooms, observation rooms, supervisors' offices, or the classroom. At no time will faculty or students discuss clients in the halls, the waiting room, the bathrooms, or the breezeway.
- Intake sheets, client files, assessment instruments, and other materials pertaining to the client must be kept in the clinic and locked in file cabinets when not in use. The individual therapist and the clinic can be held legally liable if confidentiality is breached as a consequence of files being taken from the clinic.

Client Files

- a. Client files are stored behind three locked doors—door to the clinic, door to the student work room, where a third and final door leads into the file room. The door into the student work room is accessed by student identification cards. Only registered, current students and faculty can slide themselves in.
- b. To the extent possible, students should not take client files out into general FamilyWorks space.

Video taping system (Endura)

FamilyWorks utilizes Endura, a [HIPAA Privacy](#) and [HIPAA Security](#) compliant recording system that does not require the use or storage of videotapes, DVD's, CDs, or flash drives. Endura continuously records, 24/7/365, all therapy and observation rooms, saves the recorded material for 90 days, then deletes the oldest material, rotating it off to make room for more recent recordings. Thus, students and faculty can watch recorded material for up to 3 months.

- a. The Endura video recording system requires no training or skill to operate. It runs continuously, needing only increase or decrease of volume. Students are unable to download Endura sessions. Downloads can be arranged with faculty/supervisor permission and oversight.

This policy addresses Standard III: Infrastructure and Environmental Supports, KE III-B: Technological Resources. Updated Spring 2019. Scheduled for review as necessary, no later than Spring 2021.

- b. Videotaped sessions are the property of the MFT Program.
- c. Videotaped sessions may never be removed from the clinic or used outside the clinic without the consent of the relevant client. Clients must give written permission for videotaped material to be used for scholarly purposes (research, conference presentation, etc.) outside of the clinic.
- d. All faculty office computers and computers in the Graduate Assistant office and the student workroom can access all therapy rooms and the two main observation rooms, enabling them to watch live therapy and supervision conversations in real time.
- e. If faculty wish to preserve recorded material for longer than 3 months (for teaching, conference presentations, etc.), it can be downloaded and saved.

FamilyWorks Clinic

- a. The waiting room is equipped with a security camera that records when and who enters and exits the clinic. The TV monitor resides in the intake office. Shift managers are encouraged to remain aware, but not alarmed, at all times. This should include viewing the TV monitor each time someone comes in or goes out the breezeway door. To the best of her or his ability, shift managers should know who is in the clinic.
- b. Hall doors to observation rooms are to be kept shut at all times to reduce noise and prevent passersby from glimpsing TV monitors.
- c. Hall doors to observation rooms are to be kept shut whenever a client is present. This includes those times that a therapist leaves the therapy room to go behind the mirror. Do not leave the door open to the hall.
- d. Whenever clients are in a session room, therapists are to slide a bracelet on the hall-side doorknob to signal that the room is occupied and that a session is in progress. This is to prevent people from knocking or peeking through the observation room curtain slates to ascertain whether the room is in use.
- e. Whenever a session is in progress, therapists are to turn on the white noise machine that sits on the floor out in the hall just outside each session room door.

Protection of Confidential Material During a Court Appearance

A subpoena can be issued by various court personnel for different reasons. Confidential client information is only released under a Judicial court order (initiated and signed by a Judge or a Judicial designee such as a General Master). A subpoena issued by an attorney looks very much like an official judicial subpoena. Upon receipt of a judicial subpoena, the student is to notify his or her supervisor to review the subpoena, discuss any questions or concerns, and determine a course of action. Client case files should show documentation of any action taken.

Transporting Confidential Material

Whenever case files or recorded material (DVD's, videotapes, audiotapes) are transported to or from the clinic, the following procedure are to be strictly observed:

1. To walk with confidential material (videotape, audiotape, client file) from a building to your car or from your car to a building, the student must have the material placed securely in a locked backpack, briefcase, suitcase, or satchel of some kind. This may require the purchase of a small padlock.
2. While driving from one place to another, the locked bag must be stored in a lockable space in your car, such as the trunk or a secure lock box.

3. During anytime that you are not viewing/reading the materials, they must remain in a locked container (backpack, briefcase, suitcase, or satchel of some kind) at all times.
4. While in a public place—for example, a courthouse building—students must take all appropriate precautions by being mindful that they are transporting confidential material. The locked container should be kept close to his or her person, never given to someone else for storage or transportation, and never left unattended.

Student Files

The MFT Program, Graduate Assistants, faculty, and staff are guided by [FERPA](#) policies, which addresses students' rights to confidentiality of educational records and materials with certain exceptions (see [Policy on FERPA](#)).

- a. Student files are kept behind three locked doors—door to the clinic, door from the hall to the ante-room leading to the file room, and the file room door itself.
- b. Student files are considered confidential with FERPA rules and regulations applying.
- c. MFT faculty and staff who are full-time VSU employees have direct access to all student files. The current 2018-2019 faculty who have access are as follows:
 - i. Samira Garcia, PhD
 - ii. Jennifer Lambert-Shute, PhD
 - iii. Martha Laughlin, PhD, Program Director
 - iv. Tabitha McCoy, MS, Clinic Director
 - v. Hoa Nguyen, PhD
 - vi. Kate Warner, PhD, Department Head, Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy
- d. One pre-screened Graduate Assistant, selected and approved by faculty, may have access to student files for the purposes of copying and filing documents.
 - i. The graduate assistant may never copy forms from a student file without permission and oversight of a faculty member or the Clinic Director.

Review of MFT Program Security and Privacy

Review of MFT Program computers, videotaping equipment, etc. is performed when both faculty and students perform the annual review of program fiscal and physical resources and services (see [Policy on Review of Fiscal & Physical Resources](#)).

Review and Revision of this Policy

Review of the *Policy on Security and Privacy* will occur biennially and/or whenever additional or updated technology is introduced.