Privacy Policy

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1. Purpose of this policy

This policy explains how I collect, use, store, share and delete your personal information when you contact me or attend counselling or psychotherapy with me. I take your privacy and the confidentiality of our work together seriously. I comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018, and the Code of Ethics and Practice of the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP), of which I am an accredited member.

It should be read alongside the counselling agreement (contract) we make at the start of our work together.

2. Who is responsible for your data

I am the data controller for the personal information I hold about you. I work as a sole practitioner

Data protection contact: Anita Furlong

3. What information I collect

Contact and administrative information: your name, address, phone number, email address, date of birth, GP details, emergency contact, engagement with mental health services (where relevant).

Information about you and your counselling: the reasons you are seeking counselling, relevant personal, family, medical and mental health history, and information you share in sessions. This is health-related information and is **special category data** under GDPR, which is given extra protection.

Session records: brief, factual notes of attendance and the content, themes, risk assessments and any agreed actions from our sessions, and copies of correspondence with you.

Technical information: if you use my website or contact form, limited technical data such as your IP address may be collected (see section 12).

I only collect what is necessary for me to provide a safe and ethical service.

4. Why I use your information and my legal basis

Purpose	Legal basis (GDPR Article 6)	Additional basis for special category data (Article 9)
Arranging and providing	Performance of a contract with you	Provision of health or social care by a

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counselling or psychotherapy	(6(1)(b))	professional bound by confidentiality (9(2)(h)), and explicit consent (9(2)(a))
Keeping clinical records, in line with professional standards	Legitimate interests (6(1)(f)): good practice, safety and accountability; and legal obligation (6(1)(c))	9(2)(h)
Managing appointments, invoicing and payments	Contract (6(1)(b)); legal obligation for tax and accounting records (6(1)(c))	Not usually applicable
Clinical supervision (anonymised, see section 7)	Legitimate interests (6(1)(f)): professional requirement	9(2)(h)
Responding to risk of serious harm, or to legal requirements	Legal obligation (6(1)(c)); vital interests (6(1)(d)) in an emergency	9(2)(c) or 9(2)(f) as applicable
Responding to enquiries before you become a client	Legitimate interests (6(1)(f)) or your consent	Not applicable

I do not use your information for marketing, and I do not sell it.

5. Confidentiality and its limits

What you tell me is confidential. I will not disclose information that identifies you to anyone without your consent, except in the limited circumstances below. Wherever possible and safe to do so, I will discuss any disclosure with you first.

There are limits to confidentiality where:

- **There is a serious risk of harm** to you or to another person, and disclosure is necessary to prevent it.
- **Child protection concerns arise.** Under the Children First Act 2015, I may be required, as a mandated person, to report concerns about harm to a child to Tusla.
- **The law requires disclosure**, for example a court order, or legal obligations to report certain offences to An Garda Síochána (including under the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012).
- **You give your consent**, for example asking me to write to your GP or another professional.
- **I need to protect my own legal position**, for example in a complaint, regulatory process or legal claim, where I would disclose only what is necessary.

6. Where and how your information is stored

- **Paper records** (signed agreements, notes, if any) are kept in a locked filing cabinet in a premises to which only I have access.
- **Electronic records** are stored on encrypted, password-protected device, with two-factor authentication enabled, up-to-date security software, and regular encrypted backups.
- Client records are kept **separately from identifying information**
- Notes are brief, factual and written on the understanding that you may be entitled to see them.
- I do not record sessions
- I do not use AI tools to transcribe, summarise or analyse your sessions or records.
- My email and messaging are used for administration only (see section 11).

7. Who I may share information with

Clinical supervision. The IACP requires me to attend regular clinical supervision. I discuss my work with my supervisor in a way that does not identify you (no surname, address or identifying details). My supervisor is also bound by confidentiality.

Service providers. I may use providers such as an IT or cloud storage provider, an accountant, or a payment or booking platform. They only receive what is necessary and operate under a written data processing agreement or equivalent terms where required.

Others, only with your consent or where required by law. For example, your GP or psychiatrist, a referrer, an insurer who is paying for your sessions, Tusla, An Garda Síochána or a court (see section 5).

I do not transfer your information outside the European Economic Area (EEA)

8. How long I keep your information

I keep information only as long as necessary for the purposes above, and for as long as professional, legal and insurance requirements require.

Type of record	Retention period	Then
Clinical records and notes (adult clients)	[7] years after our work ends	Securely destroyed
Clinical records (clients under 18 when work ended)	Until the client reaches age [25 / 18 plus 7 years]	Securely destroyed
Signed counselling agreement and consent forms	Same as clinical records	Securely destroyed
Financial records (invoices, payments)	6 years, as required by Revenue	Securely destroyed
Enquiries from people who did not become clients	[6–12] months	Deleted

Type of record	Retention period	Then
Emails and text messages	Deleted when no longer required for administration; any clinically relevant content is noted in your record	Deleted

When the retention period ends, paper records are cross-cut shredded or destroyed confidentially by myself and electronic records are permanently deleted from all devices and backups.

9. Your rights

Under GDPR you have the right to:

- **Be informed** about how your data is used (this policy).
- **Access** your personal data and receive a copy. I will respond within one month, free of charge. In limited circumstances, such as where disclosure would seriously harm your health or would reveal information about another person, access may be restricted, and I will explain why.
- **Rectification** of inaccurate or incomplete information.
- **Erasure** ("right to be forgotten"), where there is no legal or professional reason for me to keep it. Professional, insurance and legal retention requirements may mean I cannot delete everything immediately, and I will explain this if so.
- **Restriction** of how I use your data in certain circumstances.
- **Data portability** of information you gave me, where I process it by automated means on the basis of consent or contract.
- **Object** to processing based on legitimate interests.
- **Withdraw consent** at any time, where I rely on consent. This does not affect earlier lawful processing.

To use any of these rights, contact me and I will share my Data Subject Request Procedure. I may ask you to verify your identity first.

10. Data breaches

If there is a breach of security affecting your personal data that is likely to result in a risk to your rights and freedoms, I will notify the Data Protection Commission within 72 hours of becoming aware of it. If the risk to you is high, I will also inform you without undue delay, explaining what happened, what information was affected, and what I am doing about it.

11. Communication between sessions

- Please use email / phone / text for **administrative matters only**, such as scheduling and cancellations, not for sharing sensitive or clinical information.
- Email and text are not fully secure. By giving me your email address or number and agreeing to be contacted this way, you accept that risk. Tell me if you would prefer not to be contacted by email, text or voicemail, or if others have access to your devices.
- I will not leave detailed messages and will not confirm that you are a client to anyone else.

- I aim to reply within 24hrs on working days. I am not an emergency service. In a crisis, contact your GP, Pieta (freephone 1800 247 247), Samaritans (116 123), or emergency services on 999 or 112.

Online or telephone sessions. If we work online, I use Teams which is end-to-end encrypted and GDPR-compliant. I will not record sessions. You are responsible for being in a private space and for the security of your own device and connection.

12. Website, cookies and enquiries

My website uses only essential cookies If you complete a contact form or email me, I use the details you provide only to respond to you. Please avoid including sensitive personal information in your first message.

13. Children and young people

I take additional care with information about children and young people. Consent arrangements, parental or guardian involvement, and the limits to confidentiality are explained in the counselling agreement and discussed with the young person and their parent or guardian at the outset.

14. Complaints

If you have a concern about how I handle your data, please raise it with me first and I will do my best to resolve it. You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the Irish supervisory authority:

Data Protection Commission 21 Fitzwilliam Square South, Dublin 2, D02 RD28 Website: www.dataprotection.ie

You may also raise concerns about my professional conduct with the IACP through its complaints procedure (www.iacp.ie).

15. Changes to this policy

I review this policy at least annually and whenever my practice or the law changes. The current version is available on request and [on my website]. I will let you know of any significant changes.