



NOTICE OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO PROTECT THE PRIVACY OF YOUR PROTECTED HEALTH INFORMATION

Sound Connections Counseling & Consulting, LLC (SCCC) employs clinical social workers who provide counseling services. As health care providers, mental health professionals must comply with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). This notice describes how the protected health information gathered about you or your child may be used and disclosed and how you can get access to this information. Please review it carefully.

I. Uses and Disclosures for Treatment, Payment, and Health Care Operations

According to HIPAA, we may use or disclose your/your child's protected health information (PHI), for treatment, payment, and health care operations purposes with or without your consent. We choose to obtain your consent whenever possible. To help clarify these terms, here are some definitions:

- "PHI" is information in your/your child's SCCC record that could identify you/your child.
- "Treatment, Payment, and Health Care Operations"
 - Treatment is when we provide, coordinate, or manage your health care and other services related to your health care. An example of treatment would be when we consult with another health care provider, such as your family physician or another psychologist/counselor. Although we are not required to obtain consent to do this, we will make every effort to have you sign an authorization form that allows us to have such exchanges of information prior to releasing your PHI.
 - Payment is when we obtain reimbursement for your healthcare. Examples of payment are when we disclose your PHI to your health insurer to obtain reimbursement counseling or to determine eligibility or coverage. You have been or will be asked to sign an insurance form giving us permission to share information with you insurance company.
 - Health Care Operations are activities that relate to the performance and operation of SCCC. Examples of health care operations are quality assessment and improvement activities, business-related matters such as audits and administrative services, and case management and care coordination.
- "Use" applies only to activities within SCCC, such as sharing, employing, applying, utilizing, examining, and analyzing information that identifies you.
- "Disclosure" applies to activities outside of SCCC, such as releasing, transferring, or providing access to information about you to other parties.

II. Uses and Disclosures Requiring Authorization

We may use or disclose PHI for purposes outside of treatment, payment, or health care operations when your authorization is obtained. An "authorization" is written permission above and beyond the general consent that permits only specific disclosures. If we are asked for information for purposes outside of treatment, payment, or health care operations, we will obtain an authorization from you before releasing the information. We will also need to obtain an authorization before releasing Psychotherapy Notes. "Psychotherapy Notes" are notes a psychologist or counselor may have made about conversations during private, group, joint, or family counseling sessions. Such notes are kept separate from the rest of your record. These notes are given a greater degree of protection than PHI. You may cancel all such authorizations (of PHI or Psychotherapy Notes) at any time, provided you do so in writing. You may not cancel an authorization if (1) we have already used that authorization; or (2) the authorization was obtained as a condition of obtaining insurance coverage. Law provides the insurer the right to contest the claim under the policy.

III. Uses and Disclosures with Neither Consent nor Authorization

We may use or disclose PHI without your consent or authorization in the following circumstances:

- Child Abuse – When there is actual or suspected abuse, neglect, or abandonment of a child or elder, we will report our observations to the appropriate authorities.
- Serious Threat to Health or Safety – When there is reason to believe that you or your child may harm someone else, we have a duty to take the appropriate measures to prevent harm to that person(s). This could include disclosing information to the police and warning the victim. If we have reason to believe that you present an imminent, serious risk of physical harm or death to yourself, we may need to disclose information in order to protect you. In both cases, we will only disclose what we feel is the minimum amount of information necessary.
- Health Oversight Activities – If the Washington Board of Psychology, Social Work, or Counseling is investigating SCCC, we may be required to disclose PHI about you.
- Judicial and Administrative Proceedings – If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information about the services we provided, such information is privileged under state law. We will not release verbal information or your records without your written authorization or a court order. The privilege does not apply when you are being evaluated for a third party or where the evaluation is court ordered. We will inform you in advance if this is the case.
- Worker's Compensation – We may disclose PHI about you as authorized by and to the extent necessary to comply with laws relating to worker's compensation or other similar programs.

IV. Patient's Rights and Therapist's Duties

Patient's Rights:

- Right to Request Restrictions – You have the right to request restrictions on certain uses and disclosures of PHI. However, we are not required to agree to a restriction you request.
- Right to Receive Confidential Communications by Alternative Means and at Alternative Locations – You have the right to request and receive communications of PHI by alternative means and at alternative locations. (For example, as an adult client, you may not want a family member to know about your visits to SCCC. On your request, we will send your bills to another address). This does not apply in cases of minor children if both parents have parental rights. In such cases, both parents have legal access to PHI.
- Right to Inspect and Copy – You have the right to inspect or obtain a copy (or both) of PHI in SCCC mental health and billing records used to make decisions about you for as long as the PHI is maintained in the record. We may deny your access to PHI under certain circumstances, but in some cases you may have this decision reviewed. On your request, we will discuss with you the details of the request and denial process.
- Right to Amend – You have the right to request an amendment of PHI for as long as the PHI is maintained in the record. We may deny your request. On your request, we will discuss with you the details of the amendment process.
- Right to an Accounting – You generally have the right to receive an accounting (listing) of disclosures of PHI. On your request, we will discuss with you the details of the accounting process.
- Right to a Paper Copy – In most instances, we provide you with a paper copy. However, if you have agreed to receive it electronically, you have the right to obtain a paper copy of this notice from us upon request.

Sound Connections Counseling & Consulting's Social Worker and Counselor Duties:

- We are required by law to maintain the privacy of PHI and to provide you with a notice of our legal duties and privacy practices with respect to PHI.
- We reserve the right to change the privacy policies and practices described in this notice. Unless we notify you of such changes, however, we are required to abide by the terms currently in effect.
- If we revise SCCC policies and procedures, we will provide you with an updated copy of this notice at your next scheduled appointment. If you are not scheduled for an appointment but you remain an active client, we will mail an updated notice to you.

V. Questions and Complaints

If you have questions about this notice, disagree with a decision we make about access to your records, or have other concerns about your privacy rights, you may contact Lori A. Sirs, LSWAIC, Owner, at (253) 301-3887. If you believe that your privacy rights have been violated and wish to file a complaint with SCCC, you may send your written complaint to:

Lori A. Sirs, DSW, LICSW, Owner
Sound Connections Counseling & Consulting, LLC
4313 6th Ave SE Suite C
Lacey, WA 98503
Sound.connections.wa@gmail.com

You may also send a written complaint to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The person listed above can provide you with the appropriate address upon request. You have specific rights under the Privacy Rule. We will not retaliate against you for exercising your right to file a complaint.

VI. Effective Date

This law went into effect on April 14, 2003. The most recent revision of this notice was made July 23, 2019.