



Diabetes Counselling Online - Principles and Ethics for Online Counselling and Social media

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to offer guidance for all counsellors, volunteers and moderators/administrators of any online group, forum or chat group on behalf of Diabetes Counselling Online (DCO), to clarify their existing obligations in the context of using social media. This includes email counselling and any group or community conversations.

Given the broad and diverse nature of DCO's connections and communication with people in the community via online platforms, this guidance addresses standards of behaviour rather than detailed policies and procedures. It is not possible to provide detailed guidance for every conceivable situation; therefore emphasis is placed on guiding principles of behaviour.

Scope

The guidance:

- Provides clarification about behaviour and standards for any person providing online counselling or group support via any online means on behalf of DCO;
- Helps strengthen links between the DCO principles, values and ethics when using social media;
- Reflects the fact that individuals are held accountable for the consequences of their private actions where they may have a bearing on their standing as a representative of DCO;
- Makes it clear that participating in social media is subject to the same standards of behaviour that apply when participating in any other media or public forum.

Official and private use

Whether using social media for official or private purposes, representatives of DCO are reminded that comments in social media spaces will often be permanently available and able to be reproduced in other media. It is important that each individual works out their personal preferences for connections with "clients" and others with whom they are not usually connected, in the online space; and that they recognise the personal impact of these connections.

Social media- defined

Social media is the term used for internet based tools for sharing and discussing information among people. It refers to user-generated information, opinion and other content shared and discussed over open digital networks.

Social media may include (although is not limited to):

- The main DCO website – forums, chat rooms; blog
- Email counselling conversations with clients
- Personal Messaging, Instant Messaging via any platform

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Myspace)
- Video and photo sharing websites (e.g. Flickr, Youtube)
- Blogs, including corporate blogs and personal blogs
- Micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter)
- Other Forums, discussion boards and groups (e.g. Google groups, Whirlpool)
- Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)
- Vod and podcasting
- Social media also includes all other emerging electronic/digital communication applications.

In general when using social media consider the following 5 questions:

1. Could what you are doing harm the reputation of DCO? If you are representing DCO are you clear on your role and contribution? If not, ask for clarification.
2. Have you made it clear to others when your contribution is as a private individual and not as a representative of DCO? If not, it is appropriate that you do so.
3. Are you willing to defend what you post? Would you be comfortable saying it to a stranger at a bus stop, or posting it on a public shop window? Protect yourself as well as the organisation. This is your personal responsibility.
4. Are you acting in a way that fits with the mission statement, values and guiding principles of DCO? Are you behaving with integrity, respect and accountability?
5. Are you, to your best ability, ensuring confidentiality and privacy for your individual counselling clients and are potential confidentiality issues clear to any community members?

Mission Statement -Diabetes Counselling Online will work with people with diabetes, family members and care givers, diabetes health care providers and the wider community, communicating and connecting to enable better wellbeing for all people with diabetes, through:

- Delivery of high quality and timely online counselling and education;
- Engagement of people with diabetes in online forums, chat sessions, social networking, and groups;
- Enabling and encouraging connections between people with diabetes and through involvement in our organisation;
- Enabling and encouraging connections between people supporting and/or caring for those with diabetes;
- Provision of information via our website about diabetes and mental health; wellbeing and life with diabetes;
- Identifying problems with individual clients, groups and communities; exploring their effects and developing strategies to address these;
- Identifying common barriers to diabetes self management and developing strategies and tools for addressing these barriers with individuals, diabetes health care providers and the wider community;
- Developing a range of consumer and professional resources to be available at our website;
- Working with other diabetes and mental health organizations; and
- Encouraging and enabling people to seek and maintain contact with primary health care providers and other support services – acting as a bridge.

DCO Values and Guiding Principles

DCO values *above all else* the wellbeing of all people living with diabetes, including their family members and care givers. In everyday interactions with clients and the community DCO values fairness, honesty, open communication, transparency, confidentiality and integrity, of all those associated with the organisation. DCO believes that all people with diabetes and their families should have access to high quality, free and easily accessible psychosocial counselling and peer support and connections and operates from the principle that people with diabetes are ordinary people dealing with an extraordinary situation and provides counselling against a background belief that people are not the problem. Counselling explores and addresses these problems as separate from the person and understands that life with diabetes can be tough.

DCO Guiding Social Media Principles

In the context of DCO mission statement and guiding principles and values, when engaging with people living with diabetes via any social media platform including individual and group connections:

1. Be credible. Be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent. If you don't really have the answer to a question, don't give one. Do give an undertaking to find out the answer and/or refer the person to someone who may know. Write what you know. Know your facts and cite your sources where appropriate.
2. Be respectful. Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation between people. Don't force your own experiences on the other person or group – use your own experiences as a backdrop to your communication and connection at your discretion.
3. Be cordial, honest and professional at all times. "Listen" before you "talk". Before entering any conversation, understand the context. Who are you speaking to? Is there a good reason for you to join the conversation? Or are you there as a facilitator only?
4. If you make a mistake, admit it. Be upfront and be quick with your correction. Being human helps us to make connections.
5. Be responsive. When you gain insight about something relevant to the diabetes community, share it where appropriate.
6. Spark conversations. It is acceptable for anyone connected with DCO to begin a discussion topic to help kick-start ideas for group members to discuss at both the DCO website and on other spaces such as Facebook and Twitter. The important thing is avoid saturating our pages and forums with 'official' topics and fundraising requests. As a charity service organisation this is a fine balance as both messages need to be heard.
7. In group forums, chat and pages, monitor for inappropriate content. Contributions that contain offensive, defamatory or other inappropriate content by any person may be removed. Please note this is different from removing negative comments or complaints.
8. Respond appropriately to negative criticism. Ownership should be taken of serious negative criticism and not ignored. Do not censor discussion. For example, by attempting to remove a comment from a discussion board that is 'negative'.