



POLICY

POLICY SECTION	POLICY NAME Consent to Email and Text Communication	POLICY SECTION
SUBSECTION	RESPONSIBILITY	APPROVED BY
EFFECTIVE/REVISED DATE	LAST DATE REVIEWED:	NEXT REVIEW DATE

POLICY

Email and text communication, and any other form of electronic communication, may be utilized for timely and efficient communication with clients/participants, and may assist in strengthening client /participant engagement in treatment.

However, such forms of communication occur **ONLY** with the client's/participant's consent.

Benefits of Email and Text Communication:

- There is opportunity and access to send messages at any time;
- Opportunity to compose messages and responses thoughtfully;
- Creates a record of communications for ongoing reference in treatment;
- Allows communication about client/participant progress and practice or application of skills between sessions;
- Some clients/participants find that it may be easier to initially communicate some issues through these means rather than face-to-face discussion.

Risks of Email and Text Communication

- Although the agency has protections in place for the privacy of email and text communication, it is still possible that an accidental disclosure could occur:
 - Email messages may be sent but not received, or may be delivered to the wrong party;
 - Email messages may be filtered out as “spam” or “junk”;
 - Confidentiality may be breached when the email or text is intercepted by those not intended to receive it; or by errors in the address;

- Emails sent from client's worksite are typically subject to review by the employer and cannot be considered confidential;
- Email content becomes part of the client's record;
- Email or text communication that discloses the potential for harm to self or to another person or suspected child abuse cannot be kept confidential;
- Email may not be monitored regularly during the day and there is no guarantee of an immediate response. The telephone system must be used for any urgent requests;
- Email and texts will not be responded to outside of regular business hours.

Alternatives to Email or Text Communication

The alternative to email or text communication is to communicate face to face during sessions or programs, or by phone.

Safeguards

Client /participant responsibilities

- Clients/participants are responsible for safeguarding the privacy of email and text communications from access by others in their home environment, or from shared or public computers if applicable. A separate password protected email account is recommended;
- Clients/*participants* may request "return receipt" to acknowledge that their message has been received;
- Clients/participants must acknowledge that email from work accounts, if applicable, is generally NOT CONFIDENTIAL and should not be used for any sensitive treatment information;
- Clients /participants must acknowledge that electronic communication is not to be used for any emergency or urgent communications; and agree to follow established emergency phone contact procedures if needed;
- Clients/participants must acknowledge that email messages will be kept as part of the client's/participants treatment record;
- Client and therapist or participants and staff will determine the appropriate use of electronic communication, and agree on the nature, volume and frequency of email communication which supports effective treatment/service;
- Clients/participants may revoke consent to communicate by email or text;
- The agency reserves the right to cease the use of email and/or text communication if it is inappropriate or unsafe to continue.

Agency responsibilities

- **Lumenus** has policies and practices in place to safeguard the privacy of all client /participants information whether written or in electronic form;



- **Lumenus** has established, and adheres to, confidentiality practices for all communications. These practices include staff training, privacy and confidentiality policies and procedures, and password protected email accounts.

PROCEDURES:

During the clients/participants initial interview, or at other times during treatment/service when the use of email or text messaging is proposed, the client's/participants informed consent for these specific form(s) of communication will be obtained in writing using the Consent to Email and Text Communication form and placed in the client or program file, if relevant for client/participant service level.

1. Before electronic communication is initiated, the employee will discuss the risks and benefits of this form of communication, will explain the agency's guidelines on the use of electronic communications in relation to their service, identify the need for informed consent and review the components of the consent form with the client/participants. The Consent to Email and Text Communication form is signed and filed in the client's or program's file before electronic communication begins.
2. Clients/participants consent may be withdrawn with a written or e-mail request at any time and the transmission of e-mail and texts will cease immediately.
3. Employees will send email only from their business/program email or phone.
4. Personal counseling will not occur by email. In such instances the client will be redirected to a face-to-face meeting or a telephone or "Zoom" conversation.
5. Clients/participants will be advised not to include the employee on an email list or give the email address to anyone else. If this occurs more than once the client will be informed that e-mail communication will be discontinued.
6. Clients /participants will be advised not to include attachments with their e-mails and will be informed that attachments will be deleted, unread, due to the risk of viruses.
7. Use of password protection on the client's /participants email account will be recommended.
8. Exceptions to confidentiality, including instances in which the employee has a duty to report to the Children's Aid Society, apply to all communications. This will be reviewed with the client/participant before beginning electronic communication.
9. Copies of emails sent and received will form part of the client's/participant's official record and will be filed in the client file.
10. The clients/participants last name will not be used in the body of the email.



