



# Memo

**TO:** All Staff

**FROM:** Rachel Tinney, Associate Executive Director   **DATE:** January 25, 2024

**RE:** Confidentiality

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This is a reminder to all staff of their responsibilities regarding confidentiality.

**For this reminder, we want to emphasize the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of client information.** We will be adjusting Frontline so that a notice appears reminding users of their oath of confidentiality, that they should only open files that they have a work-related reason to access and that the database system permanently records the name of the employee as well as the date and time of access. Please ensure you only look at files when it is directly related to your work – when the files are clients on your caseload, or when you have direction to access specific files or groups of files. Whether hard copy or in our electronic database, confidential information should only be accessed if you have a direct work related reason to do so. It is also important never to share your password for Frontline, or any of our software.

In Part X of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act there are very strict procedures regarding maintaining confidentiality of client information. Breaches of confidentiality have to be reported to the provincial Information and Privacy Commissioner as well as notification being provided to clients whose information was lost, stolen or accessed by unauthorized parties including employees who did not have a work-related reason for accessing a file.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR WORK**

It is the policy of Tikinagan to ensure the confidentiality of financial, personal, employee, client, and any agency-related information.

Maintaining strict confidentiality is at the heart of social work and important to Tikinagan's professional reputation and yours.

It is also your legal and ethical obligation to treat all information about clients, employees and the agency as confidential.

***The values of our Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin service model include respect, trust and accountability. Confidentiality is key to building trusting relationships and respecting the dignity of staff and clients. We are responsible and accountable to our staff and clients for maintaining confidentiality.***

Confidentiality is of the highest importance in our work and we require Tikinagan employees to swear an Oath of Confidentiality. All Tikinagan employees must play a role in maintaining confidentiality and can be held accountable for breaching confidentiality.

### **What is a breach of confidentiality?**

It is when personal or sensitive information about a client, or staff person or any agency related information is accessed by or released to someone without the authority and work-related reasons to see this information.

Some guidelines/best practices on maintaining confidentiality:

- **Familiarize yourself with Tikinagan's confidentiality policies.** In the Finance and Administration policy manual please review Section 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 & 2.6. Also check your specific service manual for policies on confidentiality.
- **Do not discuss confidential information in any setting unless privacy can be ensured.** Do not discuss confidential information in public or semi public areas inside and outside of the agency (such as hallways, waiting rooms, restaurants, on cell phones etc) where you can be overheard by the public or other employees.
- **Only discuss confidential matters with staff who have a work related reason to be involved.** Just because someone works for Tikinagan does not mean they have the right to know private/personal information about clients or staff. Only discuss confidential information with staff who have a work related reason to be involved.
- **Don't send out internal emails with client information except where the staff receiving it have a work related reason to be informed.** Even the names of clients are confidential information. Don't send out emails to "all staff" with any client names or other confidential staff or client information.
- **Only access confidential information about clients or staff if it is directly related to your assignments/work.** Of course your role in working with clients or staff may require you to have access to confidential case or personnel information. However, you should only look at files when it is directly related to your work – when the files are clients on your caseload, or when you have direction to access specific files or groups of files. Whether hard copy or in our electronic database, confidential information should only be accessed if you have a direct work related reason to do so. Please note that when staff open client information in the Penlieu Frontline system their name is permanently recorded in the database as accessing these specific files.
- **You do not have the right to access files involving your relatives, your friends, or other community members unless you have a direct work related reason to do so.** Even if you do not divulge information to anyone else, if you don't have a direct work related reason, your access and reading of the information breaches confidentiality.
- **Do not share information with staff who may have a Conflict of Interest regarding the case.** Be aware of conflict of interest situations that other staff may have and ensure information is not shared with them.
- **When you need to bring documents outside the office, bring them in an envelope or folder and keep these with you at all times.** Take care not to accidentally leave confidential documents in offices or homes that you visit.

- **When no longer needed, do not throw confidential documents in the garbage.** When confidential material needs to be discarded, ensure it is completely destroyed by shredding or incineration/burning.
- **Supervisors should review the importance of confidentiality with employees** as part of their orientation and as part of their annual performance evaluations.
- **Confidential filerooms are to be locked at all times when not in use.**
- **Fax machines should be checked often by designated staff and faxes delivered promptly to staff.**

**At your workstation:**

- Do not leave confidential documents on your desk. Store these in a locking cabinet or drawer.
- Maintain awareness when having confidential telephone conversations, or impromptu meetings at your desks.
- Computer screensavers should be set for activation after five minutes.
- Ensure computers are shut down when leaving your desk for the day.
- Printed information should be collected promptly from shared printers and photocopiers. Where the technology is available, “delayed” or “confidential” printing options should be selected for highly sensitive documents.

**After Hours staff and others working outside of the office:**

- Lock confidential documents in a drawer, cabinet, room, or briefcase.
- Maintain awareness when having confidential telephone conversations.
- Use your work laptop for Tikinagan business.
- Use your work cellphone for Tikinagan business if you have been issued one.
- If you don't have a work cell phone, and are using your personal cell:
  - o block your caller ID when placing work calls
  - o do not text any client names or other confidential information.
- Don't throw documents in the garbage unless they have been shredded. If you don't have access to a document shredder at home, keep them locked up and return them to the office for shredding when possible.

Because much of our work is conducted in small communities where most people know one another, this makes it even more important to treat private and personal information in a confidential manner. Please keep this memo as a reminder of your responsibilities in regards to confidentiality. If you have questions about confidentiality, please consult your supervisor or manager.