



Privacy Policy

Purpose of this policy

Althea Counselling collects, works with and retains its clients' personal information. This information is important in the optimal provision of therapeutic services. However, it is also important that the information is appropriately managed in accordance with law and ethical guidelines of the profession. This policy outlines how Althea Counselling handles clients' personal information, in accordance with Australian Privacy Principles.

Relevant Laws and other Documents

The therapeutic service provided is bound by the legal requirements of the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988, the Australian Privacy Principles 2014 and the Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2020).

What is personal information?

Personal information is any information which identifies you or could reasonably be used to identify you.

What personal information do we collect and why?

In order to provide optimal psychological services Althea Counseling will collect information from clients or referrers. The following information will likely be collected:

- Your name, address and date of birth.
- Your contact details.
- Current and past medical information.
- Your family medical history to the extent that it may inform current services.
- Your educational and occupational history.
- Legal or offending history (in the case of medico-legal services).

In addition, in the provision of therapeutic services, Althea Counselling will in all likelihood collect the following personal information:

- Responses and results from psychological tests and questionnaires.
- Responses and results reasonably obtained as part of a neuropsychological assessment.
- This may be in a 'pencil-and-paper' format, or via a computer.
- Information pertaining to your session notes; treatment plan and your response to treatment.

All of the above material is used to inform accurate assessment, diagnosis and treatment plans for Althea Counselling clients. Not having this information may increase the risk that the assessment, diagnosis and treatment plans subsequently arrived at or generated are sub-optimal.

Information provided by third parties

We will collect information from you where it is reasonable and practical to do so. We may also need to collect information from others who have known you a long time (such as a spouse or parent) or from others involved in your care (such as your GP). We will always endeavour to keep you informed of the information collected and the source of that information, and where appropriate will seek and obtain written informed consent to contact and collect that information.

Use and disclosure of personal information

Althea Counselling will use and disclose personal information for the primary purpose of providing optimal therapeutic services. This will primarily take the form of a report prepared by the clinician and sent to the referrer or referring agent, plus others involved in the client's care where applicable. It is noted that in some circumstances Therapists are required by law to disclose personal information without the consent of the client. Specifically, Therapists may disclose personal information if a "permitted general situation" exists such as to "lessen or prevent a serious threat to the life, health or safety of any individual, or to public health or safety". This threat does not need to be imminent.

There may be occasions when Althea Counselling discloses the personal information of a client where there is a serious threat to the life, health, or safety of an individual or the public, or on a rare occasion to assist in the location of a missing person.

Storage and security of personal information

Althea Counselling clinicians will take reasonable steps to protect the personal information of clients from misuse, interference or loss, and from unauthorised modification, access or disclosure. Paper documents containing personal information listed above will be scanned and uploaded to an electronic database and then disposed of in accordance with the AASW Code of Ethics (2020). Electronic information containing personal information listed above will be stored and backed up securely,.

Can you access your personal information?

Clients have a right to access their personal information held by Althea Counselling. Such requests need to be put in writing for security and recording purposes and to assist in finding the information for you. Althea Counselling may refuse the request for such information, or limit the information so provided, where it is legally entitled to do so. We will endeavour to provide reasons for refusal. For example, release of information may be denied or limited where such release may have an unreasonable impact on the privacy of others or is considered frivolous or vexatious.

Duty of Care and Dignity of Risk

Social workers have a responsibility to carry out their professional duties and activities with integrity, honesty, openness and reliability. They will act in ways that support the principles of the Code and the good standing of the profession and recognise that their professional integrity rests on their reputation for propriety in all aspects of their work. (AASW, 2020).

Changes to this policy

We may from time to time make changes to this policy to reflect changes in the law or professional best-practice guidelines. All clients and referrers are encouraged to periodically review this policy to remain informed.

Complaints

Clients have a right to make a complaint about the handing of their personal information. Complaints can be made to Althea Counselling by email (bethanie@altheacounselling.com). We will endeavour to respond appropriately to reasonable complaints within 30 days of the receipt of the email.