

Privacy and Security Guidelines



As an organisation that prides itself on recognising the individuality of our clients and working with them on a personal level, we collect and in many cases store significant amounts of personal and in some cases, sensitive information.

We also rely heavily on email and internet usage. In both these areas we have obligations in relation to privacy and security and it is becoming increasingly important that we are aware of the responsibilities and risks and follow appropriate procedures. Under the terms of our contracts some of these are already legal obligations and we must comply with the legislated Privacy Principles, as outlined in this document.

Personal information is any item or combination of items that could reasonably enable someone to identify the individual (eg name + address or d.o.b)

When we collect such information we have to seek the person's permission and state the purpose for which it may be used. It would be best to keep this purpose fairly general to provide broad cover.

A young person under the age of 18 can give permission for himself or herself if we are reasonably satisfied that they can understand what they are doing. Care would be needed for NESB clients or students with impaired mental function.

If we pass on a reference with referees' names and addresses we need to be sure that the referee has been asked. If listing previous employers, advice suggests that individual names be avoided (ie just use the firm's name or a job title if more information is needed)

Whilst we can record comments and opinions we need to be aware that the client has right of access to that record, therefore we must avoid making personal judgements in case file notes. Stick to the facts and write in a professional manner at all times.

When speaking with employers (or others) it is better not to quote 'facts' obtained without the client's knowledge. EG it is wiser to say "it appears that the student is having some problems at school and it might be best not to involve him in handling money" than "this student has just been suspended from school for stealing"!

Some information is sensitive - eg race, religion, disability, sexual preferences, political or union affiliation. Sensitive information must not be disclosed without permission unless there is a legal requirement or a safety issue.

We must take reasonable steps to ensure the security of personal information - including storage and appropriate disposal.

All client files must be secure at all times to guard the confidentiality of the clients. Filing cabinets must be locked when your office is unattended, and at the end of each working day. If traveling between schools with client files, they must be secured in a lockable carry case, trolley case or brief case.

Take special care if you have open client files on your desk that others could read in your absence. Always respect the privacy of your clients and your colleagues.

General Security

Since the complex has security patrols, video surveillance and alarm systems, the risk to our physical property is relatively low. However filing cabinets containing personal information need to be locked when the office is unattended. We will install a small safe so that keys can stay in the office to be available to other staff if required.