

# CODE OF ETHICS AND STANDARDS OF EMPLOYEE CONDUCT - ELECTRONIC MAIL (e-mail) AND INTERNET

The *Thunder Bay Children's Aid Society* provides staff with access to electronic media such as e-mail and the internet for the purposes of facilitating the Society's day-to-day business. **Use of e-mail and the internet for personal purposes should be limited to lunch hours and non-business hours**, as excessive personal use has a negative impact on individual employee productivity and management's ability to manage workload. In addition, excessive e-mail volume and internet access reduces the speed of our computer network so it takes much longer for legitimate work to get done due to slow response times.

It is the responsibility of the Society's employees to ensure that these information systems are used in an ethical and lawful manner as outlined in this policy. Inappropriate use of these systems can put the individual employee at risk of discipline or criminal charges while the Society could be exposed to public embarrassment, censure, or legal action. As a result, ***any use of these systems that is in contravention of the Society's policies will not be tolerated.***

The Society respects and recognizes the individual privacy of its employees. However, employee privacy does not extend to the employee's use of equipment or systems. Although all employees are provided with "private passwords" to access these systems, the systems belong to the Society and as such, the contents of e-mail and the use of the internet are accessible to the Society at all times.

Although the Society reserves the right to monitor staff usage of the information systems, the real defence against inappropriate use of e-mail and the internet lies in the good judgment of every employee. This policy charges all employees with the responsibility to support this policy in their own usage. It is management's responsibility to ensure that all employees have a copy of this policy, understand the rationale, and the seriousness of any contravention.

## **Policies:**

### **A. Electronic Mail System:**

1. The e-mail system is provided by the Society to assist in the conduct of its business. All messages composed, sent or received on the e-mail system are, and remain, the sole property of the Society. They are not the private property of any employee.
2. Information contained within the e-mail system is considered part of the public record of the Society. The confidentiality of any message should not be assumed. Even if a message is deleted, it is still possible to retrieve and read that message. E-mail messages, including **erased/deleted** messages, can be

requested in police investigations, provide crucial evidence in criminal and civil law suits, or be made available to the media through such processes. Any of these events could be potentially damaging to the reputation of the Society and the privacy of its clients, volunteers, and employees.

3. The e-mail system is not to be used to create or send any offensive messages. Specifically, communication of material:
  - of a sexual, pornographic, racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise offensive nature is strictly prohibited;
  - that constitutes harassment against another employee, volunteer, foster parent, or student on the grounds of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or disability is strictly prohibited; and
  - that is in contravention of the Society's ***Human Resources Policies and Procedures*** is strictly prohibited.
4. Employees that wish to disseminate information pertaining to warnings about an individual or group of people, or a specific product or service, via e-mail, **must** first acquire management approval. If direct managers are unclear or uncertain regarding the appropriateness of an e-mail, Senior Management approval **must** be obtained prior to its circulation.

The Society recognizes that the above-noted e-mails are intended to warn individuals about potential health and safety issues. As well, the Society is extremely concerned for the health and safety of all employees. For that reason, warnings received from law enforcement agencies will be promptly forwarded to staff via e-mail.

5. The e-mail system is not to be used to create or send any disruptive messages that adversely affect the operation of the computer network and reduce the employee's availability to do Society work such as jokes, chain letters, etc
6. The e-mail system may not be used to solicit or proselytize for commercial ventures, religious or political causes, outside organizations or other non-job related solicitations.
7. The e-mail system must not be used to send, or receive copyrighted materials, proprietary financial information, or similar materials without prior authorization.
8. Employees who receive unsolicited e-mails of an offensive or disruptive nature as defined in this policy are expected to advise the sender to stop sending any subsequent e-mails and inform their immediate supervisor.

9. Notwithstanding the Society's right to retrieve and read any e-mail messages, such messages should be treated as confidential by other employees and accessed only by the intended recipient. Employees are not authorized to retrieve or read any e-mail messages that are not sent to them. Any exception to this policy must receive prior approval by the Society.
10. The Society reserves the right to audit, intercept, access, and disclose all messages created, received or sent over the e-mail system for any purpose. The contents of e-mail properly obtained for legitimate Society purposes may be disclosed within the organization without the permission of the employee. ***The Society reserves the right to monitor the use of the e-mail system by authorized staff only on a regular periodic or random basis.***
11. Any employee who violates this policy or uses the e-mail system for any improper purposes as outlined in this policy or deemed by the Society shall be subject to discipline.
12. E-mail Procedures:
  - a) Outgoing e-mails sent externally to another Children's Aid Society in Ontario **may contain** client identifying information.
  - b) Outgoing e-mails sent internally to a Thunder Bay CAS address (**@thunderbaycas.ca**) **may contain** client identifying information.
  - c) Outgoing e-mails sent externally to **unsecured sources** (e.g. recipient is **not** a CAS in Ontario or does not have a Thunder Bay CAS address "**@thunderbaycas**") **must not contain** client identifying information. Examples of unsecured sources are Foster Parents, Volunteers, Society Staff (using their own personal e-mail system), Board of Directors, Community Partners and Professionals, etc.
  - d) Incoming e-mails received from another Children's Aid Society in Ontario **may contain** client identifying information.
  - e) Incoming e-mails received from **unsecured sources** (e.g. sender is **not** a CAS in Ontario or does not have a Thunder Bay CAS address "**@thunderbaycas**") **must not contain** client identifying information. Examples of unsecured sources are Foster Parents, Volunteers, Society Staff (using their own personal e-mail system), Board of Directors, Community Partners and Professionals, etc.
  - f) For the purposes of this e-mail policy, Society Staff are expected to use common sense to determine what information is client identifying (first name, last name, birth date, address, phone number of client(s) or relatives). The use of initials, blanks, blackened out (redacting) are all appropriate methods for censoring a document prior to an e-mail transmission.

- g) The Society recognizes that e-mails can be both a useful and at times favoured form of communication for clients. On one hand, the Society supports e-mail because it allows for efficient communication between a worker and a client. On the other hand, the Society recognizes that e-mail is not without difficulties and limitations including:
- breaches of confidentiality such as using the wrong address, being intercepted and read by unintended persons, being forwarded to those who should not have the information;
  - misunderstandings as to what the sender is intending to communicate in the e-mail;
  - the assumption that once an e-mail is sent then it is received and will be acted upon, and therefore communication is complete;
  - the illusion of an “immediate” response to a client’s e-mail, which may lead a distressed client, who has reached out in an e-mail, believing that the worker will respond quickly to their crisis or distress.
- h) Given the limitations and the risks posed by the use of e-mail, the Society supports the thoughtful and controlled use of e-mail to contact and communicate with clients according to the Society’s policies and procedures. Both staff and clients must be aware of the risks and benefits, and clients must give explicit consent (e.g. have client provide consent in writing or case note consent) to use e-mail to communicate with them.
- i) Society Staff are not permitted to use e-mail to send any client information including client reports, notes, summaries, correspondence to anyone except employees of the Society and only using our own internal e-mail address ([@thunderbaycas.ca](mailto:@thunderbaycas.ca)) to “send to” and “send from”.
- j) If a client has consented to using e-mail, staff may use e-mail to communicate with the client. E-mail may be used to complete practical tasks such as managing appointments, supporting client’s positive choices, answering basic questions, and receiving updates or information from clients. E-mail may not be used to provide formal counselling to clients.
- k) Staff may use e-mail to send clients general non-specific public information such as brochures, educational information, articles etc.
- l) Staff must always exercise caution and due diligence in managing the risks associated with e-mail given that it can be misdirected, misunderstood, misinterpreted, intercepted or forwarded to others.

- m) Staff shall inform clients that e-mail will only be checked during regular working hours, and should not be used to seek assistance during a crisis.
- n) Staff shall inform clients that messages are not secure or encrypted and that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
- o) Staff shall inform clients that all e-mail communication will become part of the client records and uploaded into our electronic file. Time of receiving and/or opening an e-mail may be noted in a case note if significant.
- p) When staff use e-mail, no client identifying information may be contained in the e-mail and all clients may only be identified by their initials.
- q) If a Society Staff member intends to use e-mail beyond the limits set in this policy, then this use of e-mail must have formal approval from their direct supervisor and the appropriate senior manager.

#### **B. Internet System:**

1. Use of the internet is allowed by the Society in support of its operations only.
2. Downloading software from the internet is not permitted. Employees must not download or transmit information or software in violation of copyright laws. Software received from outside the Society could introduce damaging computer viruses into the Society's computer network. These viruses can also make their way onto employees' home computers if an infected storage device is taken from the office.
3. Downloading, displaying or disseminating materials of a sexual, pornographic, racist, sexist, or otherwise offensive nature that is in contravention of the Society's ***Human Resources Policies and Procedures*** is strictly prohibited.
4. Any employee who inadvertently accesses an inappropriate internet site must inform their direct supervisor immediately.
5. The Society reserves the right to monitor the use of the internet and record the websites accessed by employees.
6. Any employee who violates this policy or uses the internet for any improper purposes as outlined in this policy or deemed by the Society, shall be subject to discipline.

***Note: These Policy and Procedures are expected to evolve over time given that technology is ever changing. The Society reserves the right to change and update these Policy and Procedures at any time, and will communicate such updates and revisions to all staff members.***