

Morgan Support Services Electronic Devices Policies & Procedures

It is a requirement that staff have access to a cell phone to promote safety and accountability during programming hours. The GroupMe app is used to communicate important information throughout the programming day. Also, cell phones may be used to document services throughout the day by accessing the Therap website.

Responsible use of cell phones and other electronic devices is crucial. Regardless of why you are on your cell phone – even if it is related to the services you are providing – if use of the cell phone gets in the way of your being able to provide sufficient supervision for the folks on your team, you could be found to be guilty of neglect. Even if it just looks like it's getting in the way it could cause problems. This means that even when you wish to document services, you need to take into consideration the impact it may have on your ability to supervise folks or if it might look bad to an outsider for you to be on your phone during that time.

Personal use of your cell phone is not strictly prohibited during programming hours, but it certainly must be very limited. If you need to make phone calls or check any of your electronic media, do so only during your breaks or lunch. Picture that you are a passenger on a bus and your bus driver has a cell phone. While you might not mind if the driver glances at his or her phone at stop lights and when passengers are boarding, how would you feel if you looked up and saw him or her staring at the screen while barreling down the road? Use that same logic when you are providing services. Just because you are both sitting at a table and not on a bus, you still are being paid for a job, and that job is not to check your Facebook status.

Back to the bus driver – Even if the bus driver is using his or her phone to check on routes or traffic which would benefit you as a passenger, you still don't want him or her to do that while driving. By that same token, if you need to use your cell phone or another electronic device as a part of the services you are providing, you must be sure that it doesn't interfere with your ability to provide the level of supervision that your team needs. As a direct support worker, your primary responsibility is for the safety and well-being of the folks you support. You need to rely on your Program Coordinator as much as possible to ensure that you can provide the necessary level of supervision and also do everything else that you need to do to provide folks with meaningful days.

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Hopping back on the bus one last time – Let’s say the driver just glanced down at his or her phone to see what a notification was about and at no time was putting you or your fellow passengers in danger. Now let’s say a news crew happened to be filming on that street when the bus went by, and their camera crew caught the bus driver looking at his or her phone while driving. How do you think that’s going to play on the evening news? If you are sitting and staring at your phone when a care coordinator comes into the building, it doesn’t matter if you have gotten coverage for the person you support and are diligently trying to search for community activities for your team’s benefit – that care coordinator is going to be convinced that our staff neglects the people we support and that could affect whether or not people are referred to our agency in the future.

So what does that mean for you? It means you have to learn how to balance the various demands that your job puts on you, and you have to learn to keep your personal needs separate from your work needs.

Here is MSS’ official policy regarding the use of electronic devices:

“MSS dictates appropriate use of cell phones and other electronic devices. Personal use of devices during work hours shall not interfere with job duties or violate the rights of program participants, including confidentiality, privacy, and the right to be free from neglect. Work-related use of devices is required in some instances and encouraged in others and also must adhere to policies and procedures enacted to ensure the safety, dignity, and support needs of program participants.”

These are the procedures we’ve put in place to uphold that policy:

Cell Phones

MSS is required to know the whereabouts and status of all program participants at all times. For that reason, when outside of the facility during working hours, including while driving to or from the facility or between locations within the community, staff must be in possession of a working cell phone, and that cell phone number must be reported to the Program Director. Violation of this procedure, as evidenced by not being reachable by phone by management while on duty in the community, will result in disciplinary action. Staff are required to use the GroupMe app to report any time they are leaving or returning to the facility during working hours. Staff must respond to any inquiries made by management to GroupMe or to a direct text within five minutes unless doing so would put themselves or program participants(s) at risk in any way.

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Emergency situations that would affect staff and participants who are in the community will be relayed by GroupMe or direct text. Adverse weather conditions, emergent risks within the community or at the facility, or situations which require one or more staff and participant return to the facility immediately are some examples of risk management scenarios which rely on immediate staff contact through cell phones.

Direct support staff will refrain from all personal use of cell phones while on duty. Management staff will suspend use of cell phone when performing direct support duties. Violation of this procedure will be considered as neglect of one's duty and disciplinary action will be taken. This procedure is to be followed in full both within the facility and out in the community.

It is understood that at times there will be a need for staff to make or receive personal phone calls. If such a need arises, staff will be able to retreat to an unused office or outside the facility to make or receive the call if s/he is able to arrange coverage and still maintain adequate staffing ratios. Excess number or length of phone calls will not be tolerated. Personal cell phone use is not limited while staff are on scheduled breaks so long as no other policies are being violated.

In addition to the potential problems associated with misuse of electronic devices, staff can give a very bad impression to others if they are using cell phones while on duty. As it is sometimes impossible to tell if a person is on duty, on a break, or performing administrative duties, it is better than no phone calls be made in the general programming areas. Calls may be made outside or in otherwise unoccupied areas of the building. It is understood that at times while performing administrative duties, one may be required to move from one place to another within the facility while on the phone with an outside entity; however, management will make all efforts to limit phone calls to those same areas as are listed above.

Tablets, Laptops, and Other Devices

At times, electronic devices can be useful in programming. Direct support staff are to use electronic devices while on duty for programming purposes only. Use of the devices to research programming topics and create activities and/or lesson plans will be completed at times when staff are not on direct support duty, such as before 9:00am or after all direct support duties are completed. Electronic devices may be used during programming hours if they are directly impacting provision of services. For instance, music may be played, pictures shown, or applications used on electronic devices when the program participant(s) are directly participating and the activities are in line with acceptable programming.

Staff may bring in personal laptops or other larger electronic devices so long as they are used in accordance with this policy. Due to the close nature of some of the programming areas within the facility, use of electronic devices that project loudly may be limited to avoid distracting others or to keep the noise level within acceptable limits.

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Use of agency electronic devices is limited to pre-approved programming use or for the access, completion, and submission of clinical documentation. Staff who may wish to use any electronic devices for personal reasons while off duty must receive permission from the Executive Director or his designee.

Any evidence of inappropriate materials being viewed by staff or those receiving services may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including immediate dismissal depending upon the severity of the infraction. The determination as to whether materials being viewed are inappropriate will be made by the Program Director and will include but are not limited to images of nudity; depiction of sexual poses or sexual acts; and audible or written language considered to be suggestive, obscene, hate speech, prejudicial or discriminatory, or otherwise offensive. If staff have any questions as to whether the materials they wish to be viewed are appropriate, they may consult with the Program Director.

People receiving services will receive general supervision while utilizing electronic devices, particularly during times of internet access. Individuals with restrictions on use of the internet as outlined in their treatment plans or behavior support plans will receive the level of direct supervision indicated in these documents. Otherwise, program participants may enjoy privacy while using the internet for personal reasons when other activities aren't scheduled. Staff will provide the level of supported needed or requested for the person to access desired websites or to complete goal-related activities.

People who receive services have the right to have private phone conversations. During times when it is appropriate for a person receiving services to be on the phone, staff will allow that person's privacy to the degree allowable, taking into consideration any formal restrictions, whether allowing the privacy in any way hinders staff's ability to insure the person's health and safety, and whether the person may request or require staff support to successfully complete the phone interactions. If not in possession of a personal cell phone, a program participant may use a facility phone with approval from the Program Director or a Program Coordinator. Staff shall not permit use of staff's personal cell phones by people receiving services and are encouraged not to permit use by other team members. Some limited exceptions may apply. This procedure is in place to reduce risk of loss of or damage to the phone; prevent access to messages, images, or phone numbers stored in the phone; and to discourage people from asking to use the personal possessions of others. MSS assumes no responsibility to repair or replace staff cell phones that are loaned to program participants or other staff.

Recording Devices

Any electronic device capable of recording audio or video or taking pictures may be useful in general programming applications and to capture program participants benefitting from services, reaching a goal, or just having a good time. All photos, videos, and audio records are prohibited if they violate any of the confidentiality or privacy policies of the agency. Staff must be aware of whether MSS is authorized to take pictures, video, or

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audio recordings of a participant prior to doing so. Photos, videos, and audio records can only be used as authorized per the person's written authorization form. Staff must know the status of this authorization for the person or people for whom they are regularly assigned to work and must discern that status for any other folks. Violation of this policy may result in disciplinary and possible legal actions.

If a program participant presents with a visible injury, the Program Director or a Program Coordinator may determine that photographic evidence is necessary to document the injury. Approval is not required for such photos, but the photos must be maintained in the strictest of confidence. After being forwarded as instructed by the Program Director or Program Coordinator, the images must be deleted from the original device and any automatic backup storage locations.

Staff are not authorized to take or to share photos, videos, or audio recordings of program participants on personal social media or in any personal way without express written permission. In the event that staff is a natural support for a program participant, it may be appropriate for written permission to be given by the legally responsible person. To protect the confidentiality and privacy of the folks we support, the well-being of the agency, and the ongoing employment of the staff person, all staff are advised to refrain from any sharing if there is any question as to whether the sharing is authorized.