

Resource Document

Confidentiality & the Internet

Birth workers generally have access to a wide range of personal information about their clients: medical information, contact information, family dynamics, private thoughts and feelings, and so on. Clients have the right to expect all such information to remain confidential.

The concept of keeping client information private may at first seem relatively straightforward: just don't tell people things about your clients! However, interacting online in both personal and professional contexts can complicate matters.

Consider the following scenarios:

- A birth worker posts a question in an online birth worker forum, seeking advice about how to handle a particular situation. For example: "My client, who is birthing with Dr. Smith at City Hospital, is at 37 weeks. Dr. Smith is pushing for an induction at 39 weeks, and my client doesn't really want that, but she feels really pressured and feels that she can't say no. Her husband is pro-induction. How can I support her?"
- A birth worker posts in an online birth worker forum, seeking a referral. For example: "Pregnant person in Springfield, March 30 EDD, second birth, seeking a birth doula for their home birth, as well as a postpartum doula. Queer-friendly practitioners only. I can't do it because my schedule is full. Who's available?"
- A birth worker posts a photo of themselves in a client's home or building on social media.
- A birth worker posts a photo of a childbirth education session.

- A birth worker posts something about a birth on social media.
Some examples:
 - A hospital selfie/picture of their doula bag/picture of hospital equipment/etc.
 - “On my way to City Hospital for a fast-moving labor right now!”
 - “Send good birthing vibes for my client who’s been at this induction for two days now.”
 - “My doula baby #48 was born at home last night, a boy named Frederick!”

All of these scenarios involve the exposure of private client information, even though that may not be the central intent. Any of these posts contain enough information that the identity of the client could potentially be recognizable to a mutual acquaintance, and all of them contain information (details of the pregnancy/relationship/medical care; the fact that the client is in labor or has given birth; where a client lives or is birthing; details about the client’s baby) that any given client might not be likely to share with the birth worker’s audience of their own accord.

So, before you share *any* information related to a client in *any* context, be sure that you have their explicit permission. For example: “If I need advice about how to support you in certain contexts, may I seek it in a private birth worker forum? I will not use your name, and I will share as few identifying details as possible.”

Be particularly careful about sharing information about the labor or the baby, as in the last set of examples above. You don’t want to end up inadvertently issuing a birth announcement before the client does! Remember, too, that birth is an incredibly personal, intimate event, and that most postpartum people cycle through a variety of feelings, opinions, and interpretations of the events of the birth. So something that they thought they felt ok about you posting in the moment may no

longer feel ok to them a few weeks later; too, there's the risk that the things you post unduly influence their own understanding of their birth story.

To summarize:

- Don't share anything about your client without their consent.
- Even if you do have their consent, be very thoughtful about what you share and how you share it, particularly in terms of how your client's thoughts and feelings may evolve and change in the postpartum period.