

Procedures: Company E-mail

Date Written: 08/07

Date Revised: 08/09

Sumlar Therapy Services, Inc.

Important and time-sensitive information is often communicated via email. **Every employee should check their email no less than once each day.** If you are ever in a situation where you cannot check your email due to loss of computer/communication technology, please alert the office administrator and your supervising therapist immediately.

Each employee is given a company email address. This email can be forwarded into your personal email account by providing the desired email account to the Executive Director, who will forward the information to the person managing our website accounts.

Each employee should make responsible decisions about the emails they are sending colleagues and coworkers. It is not appropriate to spend company time reading or forwarding emails that do not pertain to the job.

What are the etiquette rules?

Be concise and to the point. Do not make an e-mail longer than it needs to be. Remember that reading an e-mail is harder than reading printed communications and a long e-mail can be very discouraging to read.

Answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions. An email reply must answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions. If you do not answer all the questions in the original email, you will receive further e-mails regarding the unanswered questions, which will not only waste your time and your colleague's time but also cause considerable frustration.

Use proper spelling, grammar & punctuation. This is not only important because improper spelling, grammar and punctuation give a bad impression and can be difficult for the reader to decipher; it is also important for conveying the message properly. E-mails with no full stops or commas are difficult to read and can sometimes even change the meaning of the text. And, if your program has a spell checking option, why not use it?

Answer swiftly. People send an e-mail because they wish to receive a quick response. Therefore, each e-mail should be replied to within at least 24 hours, and preferably within the same working day. If the email is complicated, just send an email back saying that you have received it and that you will get back to them.

Use proper structure & layout. Since reading from a screen is more difficult than reading from paper, the structure and layout is very important for e-mail messages. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making points, number them or mark each point separately.

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Do not overuse the high priority option. We all know the story of the boy who cried wolf. If you overuse the high priority option, it will lose its function when you really need it. Moreover, even if a mail has high priority, your message will come across as slightly aggressive if you flag it as 'high priority'.

Do not write in CAPITALS. IF YOU WRITE IN CAPITALS IT SEEMS AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING. Therefore, try not to send any email text in capitals.

Don't leave out the message thread. When you reply to an email, you must include the original email in your reply. In other words, click “Reply” instead of “New Mail.” If you receive many emails you obviously cannot remember each individual email. This means that a “threadless email” will not provide enough information and you will have to spend a frustratingly long time to find out the context of the email in order to deal with it. Leaving the thread might take a fraction longer in download time, but it will save the recipient much more time looking for the related emails in their inbox!

Add disclaimers to your emails. It is important to add disclaimers to your internal and external mails, since this can help protect your company from liability. Consider the following scenario: an employee accidentally forwards a virus to a customer by email. The customer decides to sue your company for damages. If you add a disclaimer at the bottom of every external mail, saying that the recipient must check each email for viruses and that it cannot be held liable for any transmitted viruses, this will surely be of help to you in court. Another example: an employee sues the company for allowing a racist email to circulate the office. If your company has an email policy in place and adds an email disclaimer to every email that states that employees are expressly required not to make defamatory statements, you have a good case of proving that the company did everything it could to prevent offensive emails.

Read the email before you send it. A lot of people don't bother to read an email before they send it out, as can be seen from the many spelling and grammar mistakes contained in emails. Apart from this, reading your email through the eyes of the recipient will help you send a more effective message and avoid misunderstandings and inappropriate comments.

Do not overuse Reply to All. Only use Reply to All if you really need your message to be seen by each person who received the original message.

Do not use the Reply All function or Forward function if the message thread is not appropriate for all new parties to read. Review your message thread. If it contains information that is confidential, or unnecessary, begin a new email. Take caution never to send confidential company or patient information outside the company. If a message thread exists, the receiver assumes there is a need for them to read it. Do not waste the receiver's time, and do not risk forwarding confidential or inappropriate information.

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Take care with abbreviations and emoticons. In business emails, try not to use abbreviations such as BTW (by the way) and LOL (laugh out loud). The recipient might not be aware of the meanings of the abbreviations and in business emails these are generally not appropriate. The same goes for emoticons, such as the smiley :-). If you are not sure whether your recipient knows what it means, it is better not to use it.

Do not request delivery and read receipts. This will almost always annoy your recipient before he or she has even read your message. Besides, it usually does not work anyway since the recipient could have blocked that function, or his/her software might not support it, so what is the use of using it? If you want to know whether an email was received it is better to ask the recipient to let you know if it was received.

Do not ask to recall a message. Biggest chances are that your message has already been delivered and read. A recall request would look very silly in that case wouldn't it? It is better just to send an email to say that you have made a mistake. This will look much more honest than trying to recall a message.

Do not copy a message or attachment without permission. Do not copy a message or attachment belonging to another user without permission of the originator.

Do not make inappropriate remarks in your emails. Sending an email is like sending a postcard. If you don't want your email to be displayed on a bulletin board, don't send it. Moreover, never make any libelous, sexist or racially discriminating comments in emails, even if they are meant to be a joke. Your emails may be forwarded to other people without your knowledge.

Use a meaningful subject. Use a subject that is meaningful to the recipient as well as yourself. It is important for future reference, as many people maintain and archive emails for business reasons. For instance, when asking about a particular patient, use the patient's initial code in the subject line. Do not use the Reply function on an old email when a new email with a pertinent subject line should be used.

Avoid long sentences. Try to keep your sentences to a maximum of 15-20 words. Email is meant to be a quick medium and requires a different kind of writing than letters. Also take care not to send emails that are too long. If a person receives an email that looks like a dissertation, chances are that they will not even attempt to read it!

Don't send or forward emails containing libelous, defamatory, offensive, racist or obscene remarks. By sending or even just forwarding one libelous or offensive remark in an email, you and your company can face court cases resulting in multi-million dollar penalties.

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Don't forward virus hoaxes and chain letters. If you receive an email message warning you of a new unstoppable virus that will immediately delete everything from your computer, this is most probably a hoax. By forwarding hoaxes you use valuable bandwidth, and sometimes virus hoaxes contain viruses themselves by attaching a so-called file that will stop the dangerous virus. The same goes for chain letters that promise incredible riches or ask your help for a charitable cause. Even if the content seems to be bona fide, the senders are usually not. Since it is impossible to find out whether a chain letter is real or not, the best place for it is the recycle bin.

Use cc: field sparingly. Try not to use the cc: field unless the recipient in the cc: field knows why they are receiving a copy of the message. Using the cc: field can be confusing since the recipients might not know who is supposed to act on the message. Also, when responding to a cc: message, should you include the other recipient in the cc: field as well? This will depend on the situation. In general, do not include the person in the cc: field unless you have a particular reason for wanting this person to see your response. Again, make sure that this person will know why they are receiving a copy.