

POLICY

Informed Consent and Service Agreement Policy

The Lifestory Practice

Effective date: 30 August 2026 | **Policy contact:** Carrie Gibbons, Practice Manager

Purpose

This policy explains how informed consent is obtained, documented and maintained within the therapeutic relationship. It is intended to ensure that clients understand the nature of the services provided, their rights and responsibilities, and the boundaries and expectations of therapy. Informed consent is an ongoing process grounded in transparency, respect and client-centred practice.

What informed consent means

Informed consent means that clients:

- understand the nature and purpose of the services offered
- are informed of reasonably foreseeable benefits, risks, limitations and available alternatives
- understand fees, cancellation arrangements, privacy and the limits of confidentiality
- know their rights, including the right to ask questions, decline a particular intervention or withdraw consent
- agree voluntarily to participate in services.

Consent is not a one-off event. It is revisited when circumstances, goals, services, information-sharing arrangements or fees materially change.

Capacity and authority to consent

The practitioner will consider whether the client can understand, retain and weigh the relevant information and communicate a decision. Capacity is decision-specific and may change over time.

Where a client cannot provide lawful consent, consent will be sought from a parent, guardian, substitute decision-maker or other person legally authorised to decide on the client's behalf. The client will still be involved in decisions as far as practicable, and their views and preferences will be respected.

For children and young people, the practitioner will consider age, maturity, understanding, the nature of the proposed service and applicable law when determining who can consent. Where appropriate, both lawful consent and the child or young person's assent will be sought.

Nature and scope of services

Services may include assessment, counselling or therapy, psychoeducation, advocacy, reports and support tailored to individual needs. Therapy is a collaborative process and outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

Services are provided within each practitioner's scope of practice, qualifications and professional competence. If a client's needs fall outside that scope, referral to another practitioner or service may be discussed.

Service agreements

Before services commence, clients or their authorised representative will be given relevant service information and, where applicable, a written service agreement. This may address:

- the services to be provided, intended goals and expected frequency or duration
- the practitioner's role and any limits to the service
- fees, funding arrangements, invoicing, payment and cancellation terms
- privacy, record keeping, information sharing and limits of confidentiality
- telehealth or other service-delivery arrangements
- how either party may change, pause or end services
- feedback, complaints and advocacy options.

A service agreement does not remove a client's right to withdraw consent to treatment or to end services, subject to any outstanding payment obligations or agreed notice requirements that lawfully apply.

Voluntary participation

Participation in therapy is voluntary unless services are being provided under a lawful external requirement that has been clearly explained. Clients may choose to pause or end services at any time. Ending therapy does not affect a client's right to access other services or supports.

Client rights

Clients have the right to:

- be treated with dignity, respect and cultural safety
- receive accessible information and communication support where reasonably required
- be actively involved in decisions about their care
- ask questions and seek clarification at any time
- access or request correction of records in accordance with privacy law
- involve a support person, advocate or interpreter where appropriate
- provide feedback or make a complaint without fear of adverse treatment.

Client responsibilities

Clients are encouraged to:

- attend sessions as scheduled or provide the required notice when unable to attend
- engage honestly and respectfully in the therapeutic process
- provide relevant and accurate information where possible
- tell the practitioner if they do not understand information or need communication support
- raise concerns about the service, therapeutic relationship or consent arrangements.

Confidentiality and privacy

Client information is handled in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth), the Australian Privacy Principles and applicable professional standards. Information shared in therapy is confidential, subject to the limits explained during the consent process.

Information may be used or disclosed without consent where required or authorised by law or a court or tribunal order. This includes mandatory reporting obligations. Information may also be disclosed where it is unreasonable or impracticable to obtain consent and the practitioner reasonably believes disclosure is necessary to lessen or prevent a serious threat to the life, health or safety of any person or to public health or safety.

Where disclosure without consent is necessary, only information reasonably relevant to the purpose will be shared, and the decision and disclosure will be documented. Further detail is provided in the Privacy Policy and Confidentiality Policy.

Information sharing and reports

Information will not be shared with third parties without informed consent unless disclosure is required or authorised by law. Where reports, letters or communication with other professionals are requested, the recipient, purpose, scope of information and applicable fees will be discussed in advance.

Consent to share information may be limited, changed or withdrawn, although withdrawal cannot reverse a disclosure already made lawfully.

Fees, billing and cancellations

Fees, billing arrangements and cancellation requirements are explained before services commence and are set out in the relevant service agreement, Ethical Billing Policy and Cancellation and Non-Attendance Policy. Clients are encouraged to discuss financial concerns openly.

Telehealth services

For telehealth services, clients will be informed of relevant privacy, technology, clinical and emergency-response limitations. The practitioner and client will agree on how to respond to a connection failure or urgent safety concern. Clients should use a private and safe environment where practicable and tell the practitioner if privacy cannot be maintained.

Complaints and feedback

Clients are encouraged to raise concerns directly so they can be addressed promptly and respectfully. Information about internal and external complaint options is provided in the Complaints and Feedback Policy. Making a complaint will not result in adverse treatment.

Documenting and reviewing consent

Consent will be documented through the intake and consent process, a signed or otherwise recorded service agreement where applicable, and relevant clinical notes. The practitioner will check understanding and provide an opportunity for questions.

Consent will be reviewed throughout the therapeutic relationship and whenever there is a material change to services, goals, practitioner, fees, funding, risks, telehealth arrangements or information sharing. A client may withdraw consent at any time, and the practitioner will explain any consequences of that decision.

Contact details

Organisation: The Lifestory Practice

ABN: 14 697 722 991

Address: 1A Old Coach Road, Aldinga SA 5173

Primary contact: Carrie Gibbons, Practice Manager

Practice Manager email: Carrie@thelifestorypractice.com.au

General email: admin@thelifestorypractice.com.au

Phone: (08) 7083 8777

Mobile: 0413 006 336

Website: www.thelifestorypractice.com.au

Policy references

- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and Australian Privacy Principles
- Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, Guide to Health Privacy
- Australian Association of Social Workers, Code of Ethics 2020
- South Australian mandatory reporting requirements.