

MFT Program Policy on Security, Privacy, and Confidential Materials

Policy Availability

This **Policy on Security, Privacy, and Confidential Materials** is available to the public via the [MFT Homepage](#) > [Accreditation](#) > [Policies and Handbook](#).

Policies and Procedures for Maintaining Security, Privacy, and Confidentiality

The MFT Program complies with VSU Information Technology governance structures to manage, contain, and recover from breaches, provide training and systems oversight, reduce risk and reinforce security, and maintain operational readiness by implementing these policies in cases of actual breach, at which point Information Technology is responsible for **monitoring computing systems**, restricting access until issues are resolved when threats are detected, and taking actions (e.g., isolating threats, coordinating response efforts) to protect the network.

- I. VSU has formal incident reporting procedures and a defined chain of responsibility. The MFT Program complies with all aspects of the formal [VSU Information Security Policy](#) that governs acceptable use, security controls, and protections for university computing and data resources. The policy defines unauthorized actions and outlines roles and responsibilities for safeguarding technology systems, outlines VSU's information security requirements, and how the Division of Information Technology manages threats to computing systems.
- II. The [VSU Information Security Policy](#) includes procedures for reporting suspected security breaches. In alignment with this policy, anyone who suspects a deliberate or significant breach of security policies must report it promptly to appropriate campus leadership and to the Chief Information Security Officer within the Division of Information Technology.
- III. In compliance with [VSU Information Security Policy, Cybersecurity Awareness and Compliance Training](#) is required for MFT faculty. This training supports breach prevention and helps users understand security responsibilities.

The MFT Program and FamilyWorks are guided by [AAMFT's Code of Ethics](#) and [Georgia statutes](#), which establish safeguards concerning therapists' and clients' clinical activities, case records, and any additional forms of information created while affiliated with the clinic. Therapists must always abide by the Code and Georgia statutes.

The following procedures are followed to assure client confidentiality at FamilyWorks:

- All clients must be informed of the confidentiality policies (including limits to confidentiality) at the beginning of the first session.
- A *Therapy Agreement & Informed Consent*, the form that outlines confidentiality policies, must be signed by all clients in the room age 18 or older before therapy can begin. Once signed and dated, the form is to be retained in each client file.
- In the absence of a release of information, no client information of any kind can be shared with a third party as set forth in the *Therapy Agreement & Informed Consent*.
- Discussions about clients and cases must be restricted to closed session rooms, observation rooms, supervisors' offices, or the classroom. At no time will faculty or

students discuss clients in the halls, the waiting room, the bathrooms, or other common areas.

- Intake sheets, client files, assessment instruments, and other materials pertaining to the client must be kept in the clinic and locked in file cabinets when not in use. Individual therapists and the clinic can be held legally liable if confidentiality is breached as a consequence of files leaving the clinic.

Client Files

- a. Client files are stored behind two locked doors—door to the general clinic and door to the student work room--and only students, faculty, and supervisors have access to a key.
- b. To the extent possible, students should not take client files out into general FamilyWorks areas.

Video taping system (VALT)

FamilyWorks utilizes VALT ([Video Audio Learning Tool](#)), the HIPAA compliant video recording system installed in 2025 in FamilyWorks training and supervision purposes. This system can record; all therapy and observation rooms. Digital material can be saved to allow students and faculty the opportunity to watch and learn from recorded material. Access to this digital material is arranged with Clinical Coordinator, Faculty/Supervisor permission, and oversight.

[Click here to go to IVS webpage, select “Data Security” tab to learn more about the HIPAA compliant Valt system\).](#)

[Here, VALT describes the various means and methods by which HIPAA compliance is assured](#) in their video recording systems.

- a. During the first semester of their first year in the MFT Program, as an aspect of the Service Learning workshop, students receive training on how to use Valt.
- b. Recorded sessions are the property of the MFT Program.
- c. Recorded sessions may never be downloaded and used outside the clinic without the consent of the relevant client. Clients must give written permission for digital material to be used for scholarly purposes (research, conference presentation, etc.) outside of the clinic.
- d. All faculty office computers and computers in the Graduate Assistant office and the student workroom can access all therapy rooms and the three observation rooms, enabling them to watch live therapy and supervision conversations in real time.
- e. If faculty wish to preserve recorded sessions (for teaching, conference presentations, etc.), it can be downloaded and saved.

FamilyWorks Clinic

- a. The waiting room is equipped with a security camera that records who enters and exits the clinic. The computer monitor resides in the intake office. Shift managers are encouraged to remain aware, but not alarmed, at all times. This should include viewing the computer monitor each time someone comes in or goes out the front door. To the best of their ability, shift managers should know who is in the clinic.

- b. Therapy room doors to observation rooms are to be kept shut at all times to reduce noise and prevent passersby from glimpsing computer monitors.
- c. Therapy room doors to observation rooms are to be kept shut whenever a client is present. This includes those times when a therapist leaves the therapy room to go behind the mirror.
- d. Whenever clients are in a session room, therapists are to slide the privacy office sign to “in use” which signals that the room is occupied and that a session is in progress. This prevents people from knocking or peeking through the observation blinds to ascertain whether the room is in use.
- e. Noise muffling capacity is built into the ceiling in FamilyWorks and is always running to ensure privacy during sessions.

Protection of Confidential Material At a Court Appearance

Upon receipt of a subpoena, the step required of the student is notify his or her supervisor for review, determination of appropriate action, and documentation in the client case file. It is recommended that the student read the **MFT Policy on Subpoenas** found here: [MFT Homepage > Accreditation > Policies and Handbook](#).

Transporting Confidential Material

Whenever case files or other confidential material is transported to or from FamilyWorks, the following procedure is to be observed:

- 1. To walk with any confidential material from a building to your car or from your car to a building, the student must have the material placed securely in a locked bag (backpack, briefcase, suitcase, or satchel) of some kind. This may require the purchase of a small padlock.
- 2. While driving from one place to another, the locked bag must be stored in a lockable space in your car, such as the trunk, glove compartment, or secure lock box.
- 3. During any time that you are not viewing/reading the materials, they must remain in a locked bag (backpack, briefcase, suitcase, or satchel of some kind).
- 4. While in a public place—for example, a courthouse building—students must take all appropriate precautions by being mindful that they are transporting confidential material. The locked bag should be kept close to his or her person, never given to someone else for storage or transportation, and never left unattended.

Student Files

The MFT Program, Graduate Assistants, faculty, and staff are guided by university [FERPA](#) policies, which address students’ rights to confidentiality of educational records and materials with certain exceptions (see MFT Program [Policy on FERPA](#)).

- a. Student files are kept digitally on our TEAMS platform.
- b. Student files are considered confidential with FERPA rules and regulations applying.
- c. MFT faculty and staff who are full-time VSU employees have direct access to all student files. The current faculty who have access are as follows:
 - i. Heather Kelley, PhD, Department Head, Human Services
 - ii. Jennifer Lambert-Shute, PhD
 - iii. Martha Laughlin, PhD, Program Director
 - iv. Hoa Nguyen, PhD

- v. Jessica Millican, MS, Clinical Coordinator
- vi. Natalie Rothman, PhD
- d. Two pre-screened Graduate Assistant, selected and approved by faculty, may have access to student files for the purposes of copying and filing documents.
 - i. The graduate assistant may never copy forms from a student file without permission and oversight of a faculty member or the Clinic Coordinator.

Review of MFT Program Security and Privacy

Review of MFT Program computers, videotaping equipment, etc. is performed when both faculty and students perform the annual review of program fiscal and physical resources and services (see the **Policy on Environment Supports** at [MFT Homepage](#) > [Accreditation](#) > [Policies and Handbook](#).