

# Documentation Matters: Tip #15

## Documentation considerations when receiving unsolicited information and communication from a client's family member (s):

A social worker's primary responsibility is to their client. While the client should be the main source of information pertaining to service delivery, social workers often receive unsolicited information (e.g., verbal communication, written correspondence, emails/texts), from a client's family member. This might include the client's partner, parents, siblings, children, or other concerned parties. Social workers must balance this information and their professional responsibilities pertaining to client self-determination, informed consent, confidentiality, and documentation. Social workers consider the following:

- Professional obligation – who is the client as defined by the parameters of the service delivery?
- Client self-determination – is the client aware that family members are providing information about them? How does the client want to handle this?
- Client informed consent – has the client provided consent to discuss their situation with family members?
- Boundary setting – are family members aware of when/how information about the client will be received?
- Client risk – does the information/communication contain information about client risk or risk to others?
- Documentation practices – has it been discussed with family members how information they provide will be documented and/or disclosed, and the client's right to access their record?
- Conflict of interest – could receiving and documenting this information create a conflict of interest or lead to other ethical tensions? How will these be addressed?



For more information related to social work documentation, visit the NLCSW website [www.nlcsw.ca](http://www.nlcsw.ca).