

Documentation Matters: Tip #12

Client access to records – what are some ethical considerations?

“Social workers ensure that clients have reasonable access to official social work records concerning them” (CASW, 2005, Guidelines for Ethical Practice, p. 10). The following questions are important to consider when responding to a client’s request to access their social work record.

- Is there legislation and/or organizational policy that provides direction/guidance? Social workers provide clients with information on how they can access their social work records in keeping with policy and legislation.
- Are there any professional, ethical, or compelling reasons for refusing client access to their records? Social workers let clients know how they can request a review of decisions to refuse access through organizational or legal avenues.
- Is the record complete and up to date? Social workers maintain accurate and timely records with the appreciation clients may request access to their record at any time.
- Does the record contain professional opinions or information that has not been disclosed to the client? All professional opinions and documented information should be in keeping with the assessment of the client’s needs and goals, and services being provided.
- What if a client is not satisfied with their record or they believe there are mistakes/errors in the recorded information? If a client disagrees with the accuracy of a record and requests a correction, social workers inform clients of one’s organizational or private practice policies.
- Is the record paper, electronic or both? Social workers must consider how access to the record will be provided to clients in these formats.
- Does the record contain information about any other person? Social workers protect the confidentiality of others when providing clients with access to records.



For more information related to social work documentation, visit the NLCSW website www.nlcsw.ca.