

# UNDERSTANDING CONSENT TO RELEASE INFORMATION and How We Speak to Your Family Members

While you are in treatment, it is common for your family to want to speak with us. We have a counsellor/facilitator dedicated solely to working with families over the phone and during the Family & Couples Weekend, if they choose to attend.



## WHAT IS CONSENT TO RELEASE INFORMATION?

A significant, underlying principle for client confidentiality is individual privacy and the right to control the distribution of your personal information. You have the right to see and obtain copies of your own records and must always consent to the disclosure of those records to others. The only exception being a court order, where consent is not required for the release of certain records. When it comes to communicating with family members and loved ones, SCHC requires your informed consent to release information.

Informed consent must be **freely given** and based on a complete understanding of the possible implications of disclosing confidential information. **Informed consent** simply means that you are consenting to the disclosure of your records to specific parties be they family members, another health clinic (e.g. family doctor or psychiatrist), or other organizations linked to you (e.g. referring agency such as WorkSafe or Veteran Affairs).

We encourage clients to allow SCHC to communicate with families for several reasons:

1. We provide support to your family members and help them learn to heal.
2. We help your family members gain awareness about healthy relationships and how to implement them.
3. We teach family members how to have open, assertive conversations rather than shameful ones.
4. A healthy family means a stronger, healthier support system for you.
5. We provide your family members with tools and techniques so they can relate to their emotions in healthy ways, much like we are providing you.
6. We teach them about addiction and breakdown stereotypes as well as unhealthy methods of treatment.
7. We discuss re-occurring alcohol/substance use after treatment, and the role of families in your treatment
8. We help you and your partner/spouse understand the unique dynamics of your intimate relationship.

By letting us provide support to your family members, they will feel more equipped and empowered to engage with you in healthy ways. This doesn't just help them, it helps you. For these reasons, we hope you will permit us to speak with each of them and provide the necessary consents to do so.



### WHAT DO WE DISCUSS WITH YOUR FAMILIES?

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Providing us written permission to speak with your family does not mean we will reveal everything about your stay at SCHC. In fact, by law we are obligated to protect your personal information. Your permission simply lets us talk to your family about, for example, your general progress, certain recommendations to support you after treatment, and attending our Family & Couples Weekend.

There may also be times when it is important for families to have a better understanding of their loved one's condition. For example, perhaps the clinical team discovers a client has dementia and needs help making decisions. In this case, we decide if it's in the client's best interest to inform a family member of the new diagnosis. Cases like this are exceptional.

You can, of course, remove consent for us to speak with your family members at any time while at SCHC. If you do this, we then cannot confirm nor deny your attendance.



### IF YOUR FAMILY MEMBER WAS INVOLVED IN YOUR ADMISSION TO SCHC

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It's not unusual for a family member to provide all the information we need about you prior to your admission. Prior to admission, information flows freely between us and your spouse or other family member. After you are admitted, you **control** the information we release. This can be very frustrating for family members if you decide to prevent us from sharing anything while you are in the program.

It's also unnecessary. Even with **full consent to share**, we limit any disclosure to the only details that will be helpful to your family member. This does not include telling them things you have disclosed to us about them or others, information that could be used against you, or information that may hurt someone you care about and damage your relationship with them. Family members are also not permitted to receive detailed information about any problems you have in treatment.

So we encourage you to give us consent to speak with your family members. While it is helpful to them while you are with us, it ultimately helps you re-build your relationships with your loved ones as you work on living a more meaningful, connected life once you leave SCHC and return home.



## WHEN YOU ARRIVE

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After you arrive at SCHC, part of your Formal Admission will be providing us permission to speak with your family and loved ones. If you provide us with consent to speak with your family, our Family & Couples Weekend Coordinators and Facilitator will contact your loved ones to offer support and invite them to SCHC's monthly Family & Couples Weekend.

As your family's support, the Family & Couples Facilitator will address questions and concerns they have throughout the treatment period. The Family & Couples Facilitator will also pass along any comments from your families to your primary counsellor.



## WHEN YOU LEAVE

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Informed Consent and Releases are not indefinite. If you provide consent for us to release information to a family member or even to another organization (health clinic or insurance agency), that consent ceases once you leave SCHC. If a request for your information is made after your discharge, you will be contacted to provide consent to release for each request if you so choose.

If your family members attend the family and couples weekend after you have left SCHC, we do not discuss the details of your stay with us unless you provide an updated consent.



**Sunshine Coast  
Health Centre**

Residential Addiction &  
Mental Health Treatment Services