



**Date: 17<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

**[www.theafsp.org](http://www.theafsp.org)**

## Introduction

Whilst the Association for Family and Systemic Psychotherapists acknowledges the value in offering an online forum where members can connect and discuss, we're also aware of the need to regulate this. Particularly with the Online Safety Act 2023 which introduced new legal duties of care for any online services, including private forums. Unregulated forums can become harmful places where people may feel freer to say things that would not ordinarily say to someone face to face. This policy is to set some ground rules and try to keep discussions professional and respectful whilst also allowing for differences in opinion.

This policy sets out limitations of what kind of things are acceptable and not acceptable, and how any possible discrimination, harassment or inappropriate behaviour will be dealt with.

For the benefit of all users, as a member, you all have the responsibility to treat your peers with inclusivity and respect. To foster an environment where everyone feels valued. Language which is discriminatory, abusive and inappropriate must not be used, and attention should be paid to cultural differences. (Also, see AFSP's EDI Strategy and Action Plan). This includes the use of any insulting language or behaviour relating to a person's protected characteristics.

AFSP will moderate use of the Forum for the protection of all our members. For use of, and access to, the online forum you are expected to:

1. **Confidentiality and privacy:** do not share personal information about others and respect everyone's right to privacy.
2. **Professionalism and clarity:** Always behave professionally and aim to be clear and inclusive in your communications. Be courteous and be aware that some people have less experience than others in online forums. Respect the rights of others to give their view and accept that these may not be the same as your own.



3. **Commit to constructive engagement:** engage in discussions thoughtfully and constructively. Keep feedback constructive and avoid personalised attacks. Do not focus on an individual but instead focus on the ideas and area of discussion. You can disagree respectfully. Remember once something's been said it can't be unsaid. Consider whether it's something that you would say if you had the person in front of you.
4. **Remain on topic:** keep your comments relevant to what is being discussed. This helps to avoid ambiguity and causing complications and misunderstandings with cross-posting.

### Posting

Below are some suggestions for effective message posting:

- Keep your online profile up-to-date and allow others to see who you are but be careful not to include sensitive data.
- Short posts have more impact than one long message.
- As we can't see facial expressions, online messages can be misunderstood. Therefore, the use of emojis can help to clarify the nuances of your message.
- When replying or responding to a message it can help to quote part of the original.
- If quoting from something external you need to credit the original author.
- Abbreviations are fine, but for whole group understanding don't write the whole message in text speak.
- Avoid writing in capital letters as this is generally considered to be shouting, as well as being more difficult for some people to read.
- Check that you are posting in the correct thread.
- When creating a new discussion, write a subject line that lets the readers quickly understand what the topic is. If it's an ongoing discussion and you're beginning a new topic, amend the subject line to notify people of the change.



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## Online Forum Policy

- If you're responding to a specific person in the forum, you can begin your post with @ followed by their name. It could also be a new subject line, for example if you're just thanking someone without needing anything in the message.
- If you have a personal interest in a matter to be/being discussed, you should declare it so that others understand that interest.
- The forum is not designed to be fully anonymous because discussions should be as they would be face to face.

### Finally

Within this forum you are free to be outspoken, and some ideas may be controversial, but you should not be offensive or hurtful. The use of words or behaviour that ridicule or demean any person or group of people using the Forum or working for AFSP is prohibited. If you witness or experience unacceptable behaviour or comments, please report this to a moderator on [hello@theafsp.org](mailto:hello@theafsp.org). It would be helpful to include:

- The time and date of the problem
- The title of the online forum
- The name or username of the relevant person
- The nature of the problem

Moderators can and will remove content that they decide is unsuitable.