

OUR PRIVACY POLICY

Privacy and security

This post offers you some general guidance in protecting your privacy and confidentiality when using the internet and e-mail, and Teacher Support Network services in particular. While we offer you our own policy on privacy (we keep your information confidential) throughout this, we also have added a number of tools to help you protect your privacy on your end as well.

Teacher Support Line does not require you to take any specific steps with regard to security. If you wish to contact us using standard e-mail software and procedures, that is your choice. It is perfectly acceptable. However, we recognise that some people will prefer to take some steps to secure their confidentiality, which is why we produced this information.

These guidelines are offered by the Teacher Support Network to help users of Teacher Support Line feel confident that any use you make of our service will be hidden as far as is possible on the computer you use; it will not be intercepted, and it will not be misused by the Teacher Support Network at the end of the process.

Please note that the Teacher Support Network cannot control all aspects of this transaction. We will make plain to you what our actions are in relation to confidentiality and we will offer you some help in covering your tracks. The Teacher Support Network cannot be liable for any breaches of privacy outside of our control. We offer this guidance in good faith but we cannot act as a general security consultant nor can our advice cover every possible combination of operating system, Internet browser and e-mail package.

The post covers data protection, internet security, virus protection, covering your tracks when web browsing, maintaining some anonymity while browsing the web and sending email.

Data Protection

If you do not wish to hide your identity when using this service, or any other Teacher Support Network service, you need to be assured that all your records are confidential. You can learn more from the Information Commissioner www.dataprotection.gov.uk.

Any data we receive from you is subject to Data Protection rules and procedures. If you provide our telephone helpline service with personal data, the rules apply there too. We can only disclose data in specific situations, such as:

If you give us explicit written permission so to do. This may be necessary if you are referred for a face-to-face counselling session, for example.

By order of a competent court of law Under statutory provisions, you can obtain any personal records held by Teacher Support Network by writing with a stamped addressed A4 envelope to Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BE.

All relevant hardware used for storing personal data is kept in secure premises and only authorised personnel may access data. Any breaches of security will be pursued in the courts and will result in instant dismissal for the employee involved.

Internet security

It is true that the Internet is inherently insecure. This is also the case for telephones, the postal service or personal conversations. However, most lapses in the security of private conversations will take place at either end of that conversation, rather than being an interception of the conversation itself. Teacher Support Network has a duty to do all that it can to ensure confidentiality at our end but you as the user have opportunities and responsibilities too. Much of this guidance will be for you to implement because that is the nature of the technology.

Assuming you are browsing on your own computer, it is generally advisable for you to check the software you use to see if you have the latest version, especially of free upgrades relating to security issues. You should also have an effective anti-virus program installed. A good list is at www.helpvirus.com.

If you are browsing through a network, much of what is discussed in this fact-sheet will be outside of your control, as it will be the province of your network administrator. In this case, you will need to use your own judgment about the security of your situation

Please remember too that if you enter into dialogues with individuals as part of the Teacher Support Line service, that our staff have rights too, and they should be able to expect that you will keep confidential any material designed personally for you.

Web browsing: Covering your tracks

Whenever you visit the Teacher Support Network web site, your computer keeps a record on your hard disk. With Microsoft Internet Explorer, this is in a folder usually known as “temporary Internet files” and in the “history” section of your browser. As we do not use “cookies”, you need not bother with them. Assuming you wish to cover your tracks, delete these files as soon as you have finished using the site.

To do this, go to the main Windows directory on your machine, usually in c:\windows. From there, you can find the folders for Temporary Internet Files and for History. Open each up, and delete the records as you wish. You can clear all the files from the browser using the buttons under Tools – Options, but this will lose all the files, not just the ones you wish to hide. Check your recycle bin and empty it if the files are visible in there. If you wish to go further, you can obtain software that renders these deleted files irretrievable to most people.

This should cover your tracks for most visitors on your machine. However, if you want to hide your activities from an expert, then that is much more difficult. One thing you can do is to edit your index.dat files. These are Windows system files that cannot be deleted or altered, but they keep a record of your Internet activity. You need a special piece of software in order to edit this file, such as Windows Washer, a time-limited shareware version of which is available at www.webroot.com/washer.htm.

Please note that none of the above will apply to e-mails, which work within software and have to be dealt with accordingly. This guidance will help you hide your visits to the Teacher Support Network web site.

Teacher Support Network record keeping

Teacher Support Network logs some usage of the Teacher Support Line site to help develop the effectiveness of the site. We keep this information entirely confidential. We will not use this information to try to identify individual users of our site. Teacher Support Network will keep any personal information that we do obtain, for example from a private correspondence, absolutely private and confidential. Teacher Support Network does not use cookies. Log files identify the IP address of a user, but this will usually be the IP provider (such as Freeserve). The main use of such files will be to monitor the machine types using us, and which pages are visited.

Anonymous browsing

If you wish to hide your identity more completely, you can use an anonymiser site. These are web sites that you log on to and then enter the address of the site that you wish to visit. The visited site then has no knowledge of, and cannot get at any data relating to your identity. Two such sites are anonymizer.com and The Cloak. If you want to see what sort of data your computer betrays to web sites you visit, check out www.privacy.net.

Regarding E-mails

Procedures

Teacher Support Line does not re-use in any way e-mails obtained as part of the Teacher Support Line process. All data we do get is kept in secure passworded servers in a secure location. We respect all of your Data Protection rights.

You may well be asked if you wish to be kept informed about the services offered by Teacher Support Network. If you agree, do remember that you can opt out at any time by e-mailing us at enquiries@teachersupport.info or by calling 020 7554 5200 during office hours.

You will receive a full personal reply within 72 hours of our receipt of your message. E-mails can get held up in slow servers, or because of other technical issues, but we aim to maintain, and usually we expect to exceed this standard.

Contacting us anonymously

If for whatever reason, you wish to contact us anonymously, the best way to do this is to set up a web-based e-mail account with someone like Hotmail, Yahoo or Talk21. Many people do this for registrations, saving a personal e-mail account only for those occasions when you need to pass on personal details. These accounts can have names chosen by you totally at random and there is no way that we could trace ownership back to you as an individual. If you use one of the big US sites, we suggest that you use the UK version (e.g. yahoo.co.uk rather than yahoo.com) as you can find that response times can be very slow once America has woken up.

Interception

If you are concerned about the possible interception of any message that you would like to keep private, there are a number of ways that you can encrypt your data. Unfortunately, FirstAssist cannot handle an encrypted e-mail without prior agreement. Please discuss this with your counsellor if you wish to send encrypted messages. The preferred form would be using S/MIME.

There is software that you can buy which claims to encrypt data or folders on PCs. Please note that such software is rarely able to encrypt e-mails.

Record keeping

If you decide to use e-mail when using Teacher Support Line, here are some hints about how you can handle best the e-mails you get in your consultation:

Clipping your replies. That is making sure that when you click on reply, you delete all but the last message from your counsellor. This will prevent anyone who intercepts your message obtaining a complete record of your consultation. Using meaningless headers. Someone reading over your shoulder, or quickly browsing a list of your e-mails, will be attracted to noteworthy headers. This is why we advocate using the consultation number as your header in all messages to us. Using plain text. Teacher Support Line accepts only plain text e-mails, with no html or attachments, except by special prior agreement.

You may also wish to print out and delete your e-mails (making sure that you keep a record of the contact's e-mail address) if you are worried about the secu-

urity of your computer. To do this, make sure that your deleted items folder is emptied when you exit the e-mail program.

You should also compact your files after you have deleted the selected messages. You can set up encrypted folders on your machine, in which you can store secure documents. This will require software such as Encrypted magic folders from PC Magic or Coded Drag.

If you have any comments on the service, please let us know by e-mailing us at enquiries@teachersupport.info or by calling the Teacher Support Network on 020 7554 5200.

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