

## *Is it ethical to friend a current client on Facebook?*

Facebook has grown exponentially since it was launched in 2004 to include over 750 million users as of July 2011. The rapid growth of social media communication tools among professionals and the general public alike led me to ask the question “*Is it ethical to friend a current client on Facebook?*” during a recent workshop at the NASW-NC Summer Clinical Social Work Institute. The obvious answer seems to be NO, but why is that so. According to the NASW Code of Ethics, Section 1.07(c), “social workers should not engage in dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client.” This begs the question, does *friending* a current client on Facebook constitute a dual or multiple relationship and, if so, is there a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client resulting from the new *friend* status?

For those less familiar with Facebook, consider this example. Suppose you just returned from a family vacation and created a scrapbook of your favorite beach photos including pictures of your children and spouse. Would you invite a current client into your home to view the pictures from this recent vacation? Not likely, as this is an avoidable dual relationship and one that may harm the therapeutic relationship with the client by confusing access to your personal life with your professional work. The same principle applies to *friending* current clients on Facebook.



If a social worker utilizes Facebook for personal reasons such as sharing photos from family vacations and connecting with old high school chums, then *friending* a current client becomes an invitation into your *virtual* home thereby blurring the boundaries of the professional relationship by allowing the client access to your personal network of family and friends. This virtual dual relationship is clearly avoidable and, as such, we should act accordingly. It is our responsibility to abide by the NASW Code of Ethics and use social work values and principles to guide our interactions with clients, including those that occur on Facebook and other social media sites.

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