

IACP Criteria for Remote / Online Counselling & Psychotherapy Work

Working online is treated as a specialism. Safe, ethical practice delivering therapy remotely / online requires adequate training, supervision, experience, ethical guidelines and knowledge of any potential risks to provide effective counselling and psychotherapy practice.

IACP Members working remotely / online should be competent to deliver work remotely and adhere to this Criteria, as well as adhere to **IACP's Recommended Approach for Online Counselling and Psychotherapy** and follow the **IACP Code of Ethics and Practice**.

As per IACP Code of Ethics and Practice, online competency requires:

3.2 On-line Competency

- a) Adhere to the ethical principles and values set out in this code of ethics whether working online, electronically, face to face or using any other methods of communication, in delivering services to a professional standard.
- b) Be aware of potential risks and take precautions to protect and safeguard the online therapeutic process.
- c) Undertake training to develop the necessary skills and knowledge with regards to the technical, ethical, and legal considerations when engaging in distance therapeutic encounters using on line technology, and/or social media. All practitioners should be sufficiently competent in the use of technology in their work to be able to provide reliable and adequate services to clients and colleagues.

In general, IACP Member should follow the same procedures when providing mental health services online as the therapist would when providing them in person.

Contracting

IACP Member and the client should agree on the frequency and mode of communication, fee/ cost to the client, the method of payment, reporting obligations and limits of confidentiality.

GDPR Compliance and Confidentiality

Therapists working remotely / online must comply with GDPR and make sure that service used guarantees confidentiality and online safety.

The confidentiality of the client should be protected at all times. Information about the client should be released only with his / her permission. The client should be informed of any exceptions and limits of confidentiality.

IACP Member should maintain records of the online mental health services. If those records include copies or recordings of communications with the client, the client should be informed.

Competence and training

Basic competence includes having alternative ways of providing services if the primary method of communication fails, having access to technological support that ensures the confidentiality of the work and keeping up to date concerning any new developments regarding technology being used in order to provide the safest and most reliable service to clients.

Competence in providing counselling and psychotherapy services that use technology require formal training.

Training should cover modules such as:

- Different means of delivering online therapy
- Benefits and risks of online therapy for therapists & clients
- Legal & Ethical considerations including Informed Consent, Privacy Policies / GDPR
- Future Developments and importance of staying up to date with technology

Emergencies

The procedures to follow in an emergency should be discussed such as lack of immediate access if required or a technical difficulty. As the therapist can be a great distance from the client, this may limit therapist's ability to respond to an emergency. In these cases, there should be an alternative support or arrangement discussed with the client.

Accreditation

Online work can be a small proportion of 450 hours for the purpose of First Time Accreditation and a maximum of 50 hours out of the overall 450 hours.

Supervision

Online Work must be strictly supervised and must meet the same supervision requirements as work face to face. Supervisors of online work should adhere to IACP's Recommended Approach for Online Counselling and Psychotherapy.

The way in which practitioners receive supervision is a consideration and may represent a choice between face to face supervision and supervision online. Online supervision is seen as suitable as it serves to uncover parallel processes and other important dynamics when both practitioner and supervisor are working in the same medium.

Supervisors need to have a comprehensive understanding of all the issues, both theoretical and practical, which have an effect on the practitioner's work with online clients.

Practitioners should also understand that they need this level of competence and expertise to support their online work with clients. There are pressures which are unique to online work with clients, which means that practitioners are advised to consider their personal self-care as a valid priority and a necessary prerequisite for maintaining safe practice with clients. Maintaining self-care (and by extension safe practice) includes, among other things, being aware of boundaries, especially in relation to practitioner availability and response to clients. Practitioners should also be aware of IACP guidelines on supervision in their Code of Ethics, which outlines the responsibility of both supervisor and supervisee, with particular reference to the setting and maintaining of clear boundaries.

Regarding supervision practice online, please see Part 2 of the IACP's Recommended Approach for Online Counselling and Psychotherapy: Online Supervision: Guidelines.

CPD

Practitioners working online should discuss with their Supervisor an adequate CPD annually in the area of working remotely / on-line that should be considered to stay up to date with any developments.

Insurance

Practitioners working online must have an appropriate insurance cover.

Online resources:

IACP Code of Ethics and Practice for Counsellors / Psychotherapists

<https://iacp.ie/iacp-code-of-ethics>

IACP Recommended Approach for Online Counselling and Psychotherapy

<https://iacp.ie/onlinecounselling>

BACP Working online in the counselling professions

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/media/2162/bacp-working-online-supplementary-guidance-gpia047.pdf>

BACP Telephone and E-Counselling <https://www.bacp.co.uk/media/2045/bacp-competences-for-telephone-ecounselling.pdf>

WHO guideline recommendations on digital interventions for health system strengthening
<https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/digital-interventions-health-system-strengthening/en/>

Irish Medical Council: Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners: Using social media (page 20)

<https://www.medicalcouncil.ie/News-and-Publications/Reports/Guide-to-Professional-Conduct-and-Ethics-8th-Edition-2016-.pdf>

American Distance Counseling Association: www.adca-online.org

Information Commissioner's Office: www.ico.org.uk

International Society for Mental Health Online: www.ismho.org

Online Counselling and Therapy in Action: www.octia.org.uk

Useful publications:

Anthony, K., Merz Nagel, D. (2010) Therapy Online [a practical guide].

London: Sage

Evans, J. (2008) Online Counselling and Guidance: A Practical Resource for

Trainees and Practitioners. London: Sage.

Jones, G., Stokes, A. (2008) Online Counselling. Houndsmills: Palgrave

Macmillan.

Weitz, P. (ed.) (2014) Psychotherapy 2.0. London: Karnac Books.

Callahan, A., and Inckle, K., 2012. Cybertherapy or psychobabble? A mixed methods study of online emotional support. British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, Vol. 40(3), pp.261-278.

Dowling, M. and Rickwood, D. 2014. Investigating individual online synchronous chat counselling processes and treatment outcomes for young people. Advances in Mental Health, Vo. 12, Issue 3, pp.216-224.

Holmes, C., and Foster, V., 2012. A Preliminary Comparison Study of Online and Face-to-Face

Counselling: Client Perceptions of Three Factors. *Journal of Technology in Human Sciences*, Vol. 30(1), pp.14-31.

Konigbauer, J., Letsch, J., Doebler, P., Ebert, D., and Baumeister, H. 2017. Internet- and mobile-based depression interventions for people with diagnosed depression: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, Vol. 223, pp.28-40.

Perle, J.G., and Nierenberg, B., 2013. How Psychological Telehealth Can Alleviate Society's Mental Health Burden: A Literature Review. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, Vol. 32, pp.22-41.

Richards, D., and Vigano, N., 2013. Online counselling: a narrative and critical review of the literature. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 69(9), pp.994-1011.

Titov, N., 2011. Internet-delivered psychotherapy for depression in adults. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, Vol. 24(1), pp.18-23.

Vernmark, K., Lenndin, J., Bjarehed, J., Carlsson., M., Karlsson, J., Oberg, J., Carlbring, P., Eriksson, T.,

and Andersson, G., 2010. Internet administered guided self-help versus individualized e-mail therapy: A randomized trial of two versions of CBT for major depression.

Wagner, B., Horn, A.B., and Maercker, A., 2014. Internet-based versus face-to-face cognitive-behavioural intervention for depression: a randomized controlled non-inferiority trial. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 152-154:113-21.

Criteria reviewed May 2019