



Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

IACP Guidelines for Members on the use of online business platforms.

Introduction

Working online becomes an important part of the digital economy. 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 IACP Criteria for Remote / Online Counselling & Psychotherapy Work, as well as adhere to IACP's Recommended Approach for Online Counselling and Psychotherapy, IACP Standards for Working With Under 18s 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.

Online Platforms

Online platforms are becoming a part of the digital economy and a therapist's life. There are more and more platforms available on the internet and our Members might have been already approached by certain platforms to join their online services, that offer services such as:

- Personal webpage
- Client management system, including bookings and client notes storage
- Online sessions by video, call or instant message
- Online payment options and more

While IACP doesn't endorse any specific online platform, it is important for us to issue simple guidelines to our Members, who consider an active engagement with online platforms.

Online Security

The most important aspect of any online platform is to provide online security. Online platforms should be able to demonstrate the following:

- Data protection compliance (GDPR)
- Encryption (HTTPS) and SSL certificate on the website
- Secure Facility & System Access such as HIPAA compliance and secure data storage
- Reliable customer service addressing any issues within a timely manner
- Risk Assessment Statement and Disaster Recovery Plan should be available
- Two-factor authentication required if sensitive data is stored on the platform

It is important that all online security has been assessed and confirmed before the Member starts using any online portal for business.

It is vital that the platform is complying with the European Data Protection law GDPR, thus it is important to confirm such compliance in advance.

Ethics and Reputation

If you are storing client data or communicating with the client through the online platform, it is important to remember the need for confidentiality at all times. If the platform is providing services to other professionals, it is vital that the service understands the role of an IACP therapist and its ethical responsibilities. Any platform providing services should be able to demonstrate their business credentials and provide transparent information regarding who has the access to any data stored within the platform.

Before you sign up for the online platform, please check that the other users on the platform are professionals that you wish to associate with. Being a part of an online

platform might have an impact on your business in a positive or a negative way, thus it is important to only sign up for services of a reputable nature with users with the highest professional and ethical standards.

Cost

Many online platforms offer free user trials in order to gain new clients. If you sign up for a free trial, please make sure to read all the T&Cs as there might be a payment requirement after the initial free trial has ended or an additional need to cancel the service, otherwise the payment is taken automatically from your account.

Some online platforms would have a specific cost from the time you sign up and there is also nothing wrong with it, as long as there is a full understanding of what fees you are required to pay for the services available within the online platform.

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