

Policy and Procedure for Online Working

Online and Telephone Therapy

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, government guidelines and other changes to the way in which therapy is accessed by clients and delivered by mental health services Ra Counselling undertakes to offer appropriate alternatives to face to face therapy sessions using current technology.

In addition to face to face therapy, the use of technology to provide online therapy using a laptop and telephone counselling sessions are important ways in which Ra Counselling delivers its service.

The guidelines in this policy will be a guide to delivering a safe and reliable service using online and telephone technology.

Ra Counselling will provide a reliable, stable and password protected Wi-Fi to undertake online therapy sessions.

The primary aim is to manage risk to clients and therapists by minimising the need for face to face contact and responding to other constraints on both the therapist and client in order to meet online or undertake telephone counselling in a safe and confidential manner. Constraints may be, for example, avoiding unnecessary travel, to ensure the space at home for clients and therapists has adequate boundaries in place with the minimal likelihood of interruptions, being overseen and overheard.

Other than the impact of the 2020 pandemic there are other positive reasons for offering online or telephone counselling and psychotherapy which will be considered as part of the assessment process, such as difficulties with transport, time constraint's and illness or disability.

In line with the BACP guidelines the term online working will be used for any therapy delivered using methods of communication using digital and information technology and related devices.

Absolute security with digital devices, software and technology does not exist. It is therefore important that regular checks and vigilance regarding threats to security is maintained at all times.

Ra Counselling requires online therapy to be offered only and exclusively via MS Teams.

Standard of equipment and technology competencies

- 1.1 I will be required to use my dedicated work laptop and/or a mobile phone.
- 1.2 This device will be password protected and encrypted.
- 1.3 I will ensure the technology on my device is frequently updated with the relevant software.
- 1.4 I have knowledge of the use of online technology and am able to use and manage online platforms, primarily MS Teams.
- 1.5 I have a secure MS Teams account, send invitations via my work email account and set up password protected meetings.
- 1.6 Concerns about security breaches, hacking or other technological compromises to the confidential interaction on MS Teams will be reported.

Data protection, GDPR, audio/video recording

- 1.1 Client and therapist must not under any circumstances audio or video record their online meetings. Online meetings must not be recorded and reposted to any other social media platform. Any online meeting must not be recorded live to other social media platforms such as Facebook or YouTube at the time of the meeting.
- 1.2 Therapist must adhere at all times to legislation regarding data protection (GDPR) and Ra Counselling policy and procedure with regard to data protection.

The client

- 1.1 The client will be required to demonstrate that they have a reliable, functional device and are able to access and use online platforms.
- 1.2 The client will need to have access to a confidential room at home that is not going to be interrupted, and where they are not going to be overseen or overheard.
- 1.3 The client needs to be confident about using MS Teams or telephone and any practical constraints need to be understood by the therapist and addressed.
- 1.4 The client understands and accepts the limitations of technology and that there is no such thing as 100% security.
- 1.5 The client's use of online technology and ability to address their needs using this platform has been reviewed by the therapist.

The therapist

1.1 The therapist has agreed to work from home or another secure offsite setting to undertake therapy.

1.2 The therapist has a room to work in that is confidential, will not be interrupted and where they will not be overseen or overheard. The therapist has secured an anonymized back drop with no personal identifying features that could be a distraction for the client.

1.3 The first online/telephone appointment is used primarily to assess and review the suitability of online/telephone therapy and to complete a new client agreement.

The first meeting should include:

- checking in with the client regarding the use of technology and addressing any issues and concerns
- checking whether the room they are using is confidential and agreeing strategies for dealing with interruptions should they occur, or the technology breaking (internet connection, faulty equipment). Agreeing a plan of action together, for example make a phone call or write to the client and send in the post if the broken connection or device is not resolved
- completing a client agreement
- clarifying payment process
- clarifying boundaries and acknowledging limitations particularly around attunement and congruence. Agreeing to check in regularly regarding communication and understanding
- clarifying expectations; what do you need right now? What would you like to focus on first?
- co-produce a self-care plan; what will you do to prepare for your session and what will you do to take care of yourself afterwards?
- co-produce a safety plan; where there is acknowledgement of thoughts and feelings about self-harm or suicidal thoughts and feelings work to explore a plan with contact numbers and other resources that may be available
- agree regular light touch reviews and checking in; how are we doing together with this way of working? Is there anything we need to think about together?
- Agree how to pace things and working together co-produce a strategy for working with any disinhibited communication, emotional overwhelm and flooding of difficult to contain feelings and physical responses. Work with the client to communicate at a pace that can facilitate awareness, self-reflection and integration. This may require some gentle 'directive' interventions; shall we pause? do you need to stand and walk around the space you are in? shall we do a simple breathing exercise?

1.4 The therapist will attend group supervision whilst working with clients whether this is online or face to face.