



Policy

Introduction to the use of technology in counselling

Guidelines for ACC Counsellors and Supervisors

ACC recognises that there are a variety of technologies available for use – telephone, email, chat rooms/instant messaging and more recently video conference (Skype is one example). The following is no substitute for specific training.

The issues for any user of technology are

- Client Suitability
- Counsellor or Supervisor Skills
- Contracting
- Technical Matters
- Ethics and Practice, Codes and Legal Issues

Client Suitability

Not all clients or the issues they bring may be suited to forms of technology counselling. The assessment of a client's suitability is of utmost importance and needs exercising with particular care and skill. The responsibility lies with the counsellor (or supervisor when being used for supervision) to determine whether a client's needs can be met online or whether referral for face to face counseling is in their best interests. Since it can be quite difficult when using technology to authenticate the accuracy of client disclosed information there may be cases you would not normally accept. An initial assessment to establish suitability and appropriateness before offering the service to the client is essential. For example you may decide not to take on clients who have complicated or multiple issues but rather refer these potential clients to a specialist agency as it may be more difficult to assess progress if you cannot actually see your client

Counsellor and Supervisor skills

Counsellors (or supervisors) who offer services through technology need to ensure that they are suitably trained and qualified for their work. ACC recognises that such work is a specialist area and only practised by those with post-qualification experience of face-to-face work. From the date of these guidelines ACC expects those who choose to use any of these methodologies to have appropriate training (relevant to their choice) within 2 years if they wish it to be included in their application for accreditation.

Here are some providers of training as examples:

www.onlinetherapyinstitute.com



www.ocst.co.uk

www.acto-uk.org

www.learning-curve.org

www.lcybershrink.com/training

www.OnlineCounsellors.co.uk

www.onlinetraining4counsellors.com

Contracting

At present there are no specific guidelines for how to contract sessions when using technology. Counsellors/ organizations/ supervisors must ensure clients understand any financial implications (if applicable) of the service and provide secure forms of payment options. In contracting with a client, it is good practice for the counsellor to include information regarding their supervisory arrangements (particularly with regard to confidentiality of any electronic records) and what the procedure is in the event of their illness or death. They should also ensure the client understands the role and implementation of supervision and how it affects their confidentiality provisions online.

Clients should be able to substantiate, in an easily accessible way, the accuracy and adequacy of the counsellors stated qualifications.

The path (or links) to authentication need to be straightforward for the client prior to counselling. Any information provided needs to state the code of ethics which applies. All usual arrangements need total clarity to maximize understanding. If using text based methods then contracting needs to indicate that neither client nor counsellor can forward these exchanges or extracts to anyone including the supervisor (without due regard to anonymity) and the implications of such a breach.

Counsellors need an agreed process of what would happen if the client presents as 'at risk' to themselves or posing a high risk to others. Clarifying the levels of the client's support is essential as part of the duty of care.

It would be prudent to state whether the counsellor is working for an organization or in private practice.

Technical Matters



Counsellors must ensure all reasonable measures are in place to protect confidential information against risk of interception by a third party, whether remotely or by a person with access to the client's or therapist's computer. Where applicable (as in English law), therapists should ensure that they comply with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998, www.ico.gov.uk including obtaining explicit consents for any processing of data, the

purpose to which the data will be put and to any transfer of the data. Encryption packages and privacy software tools are essential. Provision of what happens in any event of systems breakdown. All hardware and software needs maintaining at optimum levels. For example the responsibility of the counsellor is to ensure appropriate firewalls and virus checking programs are in place on their own computer and recommend similar precautions to their potential client/s.

Ethics and practice, codes, and legal issues

The location and age of the client are important matters for consideration. Counsellors must recognise that the laws of their own country govern them. (It is probably wise to discover if possible if there were any laws that affect counselling in the client's country. The counsellor may choose to contract with the client to work within UK law. For example there are age restrictions in some countries and protection laws of minors as in the UK. Other countries make it illegal for counselling across state boundaries as in the USA).

ACC's accreditation process regarding counselling using technology in support of accreditation criteria and training used toward CPD and personal development is acceptable. However the following will apply:

***Within 2 years of publication of these guidelines any counsellor/supervisor wishing to count online or technological methods towards their accreditation (or reaccreditation) will need to demonstrate or provide evidence of specific training in this field.**

Practitioner in Training

ACC does not accept applications where counselling includes technological methodologies (online work) from counsellors at this level.

Counselling Practitioner



ACC accepts applications where counselling hours include online work (or other technologies), from counsellors who have completed a Diploma in counselling and provide *a certificate of at least 20 hours subsequent training in online counselling (or for their specific technology) [NB Counsellors do not normally require a Diploma at this level but will for online counselling use. Normal accreditation processes apply, see footnote¹].

Confidentiality requires counselling of this kind must take place in a room where there is no-one else present. ACC expects online counselling at this level would only constitute 25% of their total counselling hours as revealed in their logs (usually per year). We recommend that if possible you have a supervisor with training in technology use which can be a different supervisor than for your face-to-face work.

Accredited Counsellor

ACC accepts applications where counselling hours include online work from counsellors who have completed a Diploma in counselling and provide *a certificate of at least 20 hours subsequent training in online counselling (or for their specific technology). At the first accreditation at this level we will accept up to 35%. After that we recommend that normally you keep an element of face to face counselling in your portfolio. [Normal accreditation processes apply, see footnote¹].

Confidentiality requires counselling of this kind must take place in a room where there is no-one else present. We recommend that if possible you have a supervisor with training in technology use which can be a different supervisor than for your face-to-face work.

Accredited Supervisors

ACC accepts applications where supervision hours include online work, from supervisors who have completed a Diploma in counselling and provide *a certificate of at least 20 hours subsequent training in online counselling/supervision (or for their specific technology). It would normally recommend that you keep an element of face to face counselling in your portfolio of counselees. [Normal accreditation processes apply, see footnote¹].

ACC would normally expect supervision to be face-to-face but recognize that some counsellors live overseas/too far away or maybe disabled and unable to travel to a

¹ If counselling training is undertaken online ACC normally expects applicants to have 3 weeks face to face training for Accredited Counsellors and 2 weeks for Counselling Practitioners. This is usually part of a residential school for online trainers.



Supervisor. We recommend that if possible you have a supervisor with training in online work (or our specific technology) which can be a different supervisor than for your face-to-face work. ACC recommends such a method as Skype in these circumstances (i.e. a secure video conference method). ACC recommends that a built-in camera on the computer is better than a webcam when possible. ACC expects that before supervision commences, preparation/contracting would include issues concerning technical breakdown. Confidentiality requires supervision take place in a room where there is no-one else present.

When submitting an application to include technological methods you will need:

A certificate in training of online work

A sample contract used solely for online work

A clause in your insurance certificate which mentions cover for online work