

11th March 2021

Dear Counselling Members & Affiliates,

Some of you have been asking whether ACC's guidance about working face-to-face with clients will be changing in response to the government's roadmap out of lockdown.

The official government advice remains to work at home if at all possible. As per our Covid-19 advice email (5th January) this has included implicit or explicit acceptance that those working in health and social care may need to work directly with people in in-person settings, and some of you will have been working in this way. As from this week in England it is now permissible to meet another person outside for recreation and members may therefore feel able to resume outdoor therapy and/or 'walk and talk' therapy.

As we look to the future we know that the situation with the pandemic in the U.K. remains one of concern, and we need to heed the government's advice which is subject to change as uncertainty continues. However, it is also evident that the success of the vaccination programme has given hope, and currently we have an expectation that we will be coming out of lockdown this Spring or early Summer, with the 17th May as the earliest date when in England we could see a return to something close to 'normal', with all businesses and services being able to open. There may continue to be restrictions with regard to maintaining distance and the wearing of face coverings, but it is reasonable to expect that for the majority of members the end of lockdown signals a return to face-to-face practice. We know that each of the devolved administrations will be making their own plans about when and what opens up (see helpful links below) and that the actual dates may be influenced by infection rates – **but, an end is in sight.**

Returning to In-Person Practice

Enablers to returning to face-to-face practice include vaccination, regular lateral flow tests, and making premises Covid secure. However, we want also to consider other factors, for example, the impact on all of us of having lived through the last few months with its losses and gains. In order to help in this process we will be holding the following:

Counselling Members Open Forum Thursday 25th March 7.30 – 9.00 pm Beyond the practicalities: meeting clients in person again – a trauma informed reflection on the fear of overwhelm

There has been mainly a focus professionally on practical aspects of safe face-to-face counselling practise from handwashing to the wearing of masks and the use of barriers, etc. However, we would like to provide the opportunity for members to explore also the personal and emotional impacts of coming out of the pandemic and preparing to meet clients and colleagues again.

We are therefore hosting a free open forum for counselling members and counsellors working in our affiliates. Please put the date in your diary. Further details and the zoom link will follow.

Useful Information and Links:

Vaccination: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/>

We understand that vaccination is open to counsellors as people working in health and social care and with an expected return to work in the early summer anyone who has not been vaccinated may want to take this option.

Vaccination is a personal choice, but we strongly recommend that you are open with your clients about whether or not you have been vaccinated against COVID-19 prior to meeting in person.

Lateral Flow Tests: <https://www.gov.uk/get-workplace-coronavirus-tests>

Our current understanding is that anyone who is returning to work should have twice weekly rapid result lateral flow Covid tests.

As an individual you can book these through your local county council's website and they are normally delivered via local chemists.

For affiliates the government has this week removed the restriction relating to number of employees to obtain free lateral flow tests. Businesses and charities must register to obtain free Covid-19 lateral tests **by 31st March** (using the link above).

Making Premises COVID Secure: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

We can offer no specific guidance in this area as each setting is so different. We are happy to collate ways in which you have adapted your homes and premises to prepare for working with clients and publish on our website to help others. Please send your contributions to office@acc-uk.org with "COVID-19 Safe" as the subject.

Indicative Time Frames for Release of Lockdown

England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary>

Scotland

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-strategic-framework-update-february-2021/pages/protective-measures-and-our-levels-approach/>

Northern Ireland

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-pathway-out-restrictions>

Wales

<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-control-plan-alert-levels-wales-coming-out-lockdown>

Self-Employment Grant – Information about applying for the 4th grant covering February – April 2021

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/self-employment-income-support-scheme-grant-extension/self-employment-income-support-scheme-grant-extension>

Best wishes



Kathy Spooner

CEO
Association of Christian Counsellors