



### ***Key Points from On-Line Events Q&A on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020***

The panel was made of three experienced practitioners: John Wilson, Kate Dunn and Carole Francis-Smith who offer on-line and telephone counselling, supervision and training.

Many of the points discussed and recommendations made were as with ACC's recent advice. It is reassuring to know that many counsellors are thinking responsibly and creatively about how they can continue to practice, especially in support of existing clients. These brief notes are offered to help ACC members – however the full session is available to listen to for free following this link.

<https://www.onlineevents.co.uk/event/coronavirus-considering-our-responses-and-responsibilities-kate-dunn-and-carole-francis-smith/>

#### Starting Point

- There are lots of counsellors who are feeling anxious about the current situation and working through how best they can support clients when face-to-face counselling is no longer an option. Many have felt especially nervous when they have held their first on-line or telephone counselling session. It was acknowledged that counsellors are finding themselves in situations that they would rather not be in and with decisions to make that seem to go against the grain of normal professional practice in relation to having to hastily consider moving to on-line or telephone counselling.

#### Options

- The panel felt that telephone and on-line counselling may be a 'good enough' option for these un-precedented times, especially where a counsellor has an on-going relationship with a client. The suitability for the client and counsellor needs to be assessed, and the scope of the work possible to do, figured out.

A case was made for the importance of supporting and sustaining clients by keeping in touch through telephone or internet, even where it might not be possible to do deeper therapeutic work.

It was also acknowledged that this might not be the right route for all counsellors or all clients and that it was O.K. to take a break in practice.

### Supervision

- The importance of seeking the support of your supervisor and checking with your insurance company were affirmed. Although standard practice guidelines recommend that if you work on-line or in telephone counselling you should find a supervisor who has experience in working in this way, the recommendation from the panel for these challenging times is to stay with your existing supervisor because they know you and know your clients. The on-line events team are exploring ways in which they might get a listing of supervisors, skilled and experience in on-line or telephone counselling as a general resource for other supervisors who are less experienced in this field

### Environment

- Working from home might be new for counsellors, so it's worth spending time thinking about where you will be situated and how your environment will be organised (for e.g. the backdrop that the client will see when counselling on-line). Especially where the space you are conducting on-line or telephone counselling, is not where you have done face-to-face counselling, then you need also to set it out so that it helps you inhabit your 'counselling self' – so that you can become prepared mentally and emotionally to connect with clients.

One important difference is that with on-line or telephone counselling you cannot be responsible for/have control over the whole environment – emphasising the importance of discussing with your client that they find a place in which they can be free to speak in confidence, without being interrupted or overheard. This might be especially difficult when families are isolating together. An example given was of a client who had telephone counselling in his car, because it was the only place that was safe and private for him.

### Contracting/Arrangement – The shape of a session

- The importance of sorting out arrangements for connecting, taking payment and what happens when things go wrong, e.g. connectivity is lost, in advance of and separate to the time dedicated to counselling was seen to be an important consideration. As was having something that marked the beginning and end of sessions. In face-to-face counselling for example there might be ways that you greet a client, e.g. take their coat, have an exchange of small talk etc– which simply won't happen in the same way with on-line clients. Moving from face-to-face to on-line or telephone counselling will feel different for both the counsellor and the client – and it is good to acknowledge that together and develop new ways of easing into a session and drawing it to a close, and parting.

### Disinhibition

- One common phenomenon in on-line and telephone counselling is that clients may become disinhibited, and often will tell you more, and reveal more quickly

than they might have during face-to-face sessions. Although in many ways this may seem encouraging from a counsellor's perspective – it can create anxiety and leave the client feeling very exposed and vulnerable at the end of the session. The advice was to try to slow the pace of the session down if you noticed this happening – and to acknowledge (as appropriate) with the client that they seem to be sharing more deeply – and explore why that might be and how they might manage the feelings that come with that.

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