

A guide to assess health and safety risks when working from home

We have put together some questions to consider when you are working from and seeing clients at home.

Insurance

Does your insurance cover you for working from home as a counsellor? You should be covered for your client work (professional liability) but does your home policy cover the fact that you work in/from your home and, where applicable, clients come to your home?

How safe is your home for you and your clients?

1. Do you have a separate entrance for the counselling room that is not through your home/living space? If not, have you considered this and how do you mitigate against the risks to clients and your family (i.e. confidentiality as one instance)?
2. Is there sufficient segregation from disruptions, e.g. children, pets, other family members?
3. Is it a dedicated room or used for other purposes?
4. Is your working area warm, well-lit and well-ventilated?
5. Is the lighting in the room at the right level?
6. Are the floor coverings getting to and in the room secured down and not posing a risk of slip, trips or falls? Is the furniture arranged in such a way as not to cause any risk?
7. Is the seating safe and comfortable?
8. Is there any level of noise that would interfere with your work or counselling?
9. If you provide any refreshments, what risks might that pose?
10. If toilet facilities are available to a client, how do you manage any risks that suggests?
11. Do you have access easily to a first aid kit if it was required?

12. If you are working alone, have you any policy for managing risk and personal safety? Do you have someone you can call in an emergency for support if the need arose? Do you have a personal safety alarm?
13. Are important files and equipment, like laptops, kept securely away when not in use?

Fire

14. Are smoke detectors working and checked regularly?
15. Do you have a clear escape route and emergency plans in place in the event of a fire?
16. Are all combustible materials (including paper) stored safely and away from any possible sources of ignition? Do you regularly dispose of waste, including papers, to prevent a build-up of fire 'fuel'?
17. Are all possible ignition sources secure?

Electrical

18. If electrical equipment used for home working in good condition and free from any visual faults?
19. Can you confirm that there is no visible damage (including any signs of overheating) to sockets, plugs and leads?
20. Are all cables secure in plugs with no inner cores of the cable visible?
21. If extension leads are used, are these the fused and switched type? (Cables and extension leads should be positioned so that they are not subject to excessive wear or damage and do not present a trip hazard.)

Display screen and desk set up

22. If you regularly use a computer at home for counselling work, do you have your eyes tested regularly?
23. Is your desk chair set up correctly so that your lower back is supported?
Does your chair have armrests and are your feet flat on the floor?
24. Do you have enough surface desk space to work comfortably?
25. Is your PC at right angles to a window, i.e. positioned so that there is no glare from a window or light? Is the screen level with your eyes so it doesn't cause discomfort to your neck and head?

26. Are your keyboard and mouse clean and within easy reach, without having to stretch?
27. Can you reach everything that you need without twisting and straining your body?
28. Are all your appliances in good order with no signs of wear and tear?
29. Are there trailing electrical cables around your working area that need to be tied up?
30. Are heavy items stored on lower shelves to avoid the need for lowering them?

Remote therapy

31. Do you have an agreement with your clients that covers potential hazards for them when accessing therapy online or via telephone?
32. Do you advise clients to ensure that they are not driving while having a telephone session?
33. Do you hold an emergency contact number and know the client's address or location in the case of the client suddenly becoming ill/incapacitated during an online session?