



**UK Association for Humanistic
Psychology Practitioners**

Guidance for Working Online

Online working is the new normal in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is a huge change for psychotherapists and counsellors whose work has for so long been rooted in face to face work with clients, even if occasional online working has been undertaken in response to a client's temporary inability to travel to sessions, or for supervision with a geographically remote supervisor. The following guidance covers

- (A) vital checks and changes that are essential when working online.
- (B) links to expert advice for making the best of this new way of working.

Essential requirements when working online

1. Insurance cover

Does your professional indemnity insurance cover you for working online. If you don't know – read your policy carefully. If you are already working online your policy does not clearly cover you for this, you must contact your insurer or broker and arrange this additional cover.

2. Confidentiality

- A. Both you and your client need access to a suitably quiet, private, comfortable space where no-one will interrupt at any time during the session.
- B. Phone calls using a mobile phone are not very secure. There have been instances where a telephone session has been recorded and uploaded onto the web. WhatsApp has end-to-end encryption and is therefore a more secure phone call platform but contacts are easily shared with other WhatsApp users inadvertently. For a client who does not have good broadband, or does not have a smart phone (see video-calls below) it may be that a telephone landline is a better option.
- C. Different video-call products offer different levels of security or confidentiality. End-to-end encryption is essential. VSee (used in the NHS) and Zoom are prominent among those offering end-to-end encryption.
- D. Obviously, all these considerations are as important for supervision as for work with clients.

3. Data protection

Update your current GDPR messaging to clients to cover online working.

4. UK and outside UK

Ensure you know your client's address i.e. the address where they are for each of your sessions with them. UKAHPP registration, accreditation, and higher accreditation relate

to your working in the United Kingdom only. Therefore, when moving your locally based practice online your UKAHP professional status remains valid. But if your online practice leads to online work outside the UK you must carefully check the local professional standards that apply where your client is based. These vary considerably and, in some cases, prohibit online working.

5. Health and illness

- A. Your therapeutic executor must have an up to date list of all your clients and their contact information. Ensure that someone close to you knows who is your therapeutic executor and how to contact them in case you are too ill to do this yourself.
- B. Review your contract arrangements with your clients, particularly regarding payment for missed sessions, and in case of illness. You will of course do this sensitively.
- C. There is growing evidence that continuing to work while ill with Covid-19, even if symptoms seem mild, is unwise. It may seem safe to continue to do online work with clients as there is no risk of spreading the infection. However, to maximise chances for a good recovery, rest is crucial: take a break until you are well again. If you are affected, and a client is too vulnerable to interrupt their therapy, be prepared to make referrals to trusted colleagues. If a client has symptoms, encourage them to rest. Discuss with them how best they can be supported at this time.

6. Practical matters

It goes without saying that you will need a suitable device and sufficient internet strength and reliability to facilitate a good quality of engagement with your clients. You also need to hold and facilitate your work with your competency and professionally. If you are new to online working, set up some practice sessions with friends or colleagues to gain experience of handling the technology and resolving the inevitable glitches. Make sure you know whether and how clients can switch off the image of themselves, invariably supplied by video-call software, if they want to do this.

7. Asynchronous Therapy

This relates to engaging with a client who is seeking therapeutic help through the medium of texting or emails or another form of online messaging rather than telephone or online counselling where the counsellor and client use a phone call to speak and listen to each other in real-time.

UKAHP does not recognise online written messages as being a form of psychotherapy or psychotherapeutic counselling. Messaging or emailing may constitute a supplementary part of ongoing therapeutic face-to face work and audio/visual online working. Beyond such a supplementary aspect, asynchronous therapy is not endorsed under UKAHP registration. UKAHP registrants should ensure that this mode of practice is covered by their professional liability insurance

8. When online does not work out

For reasons that are practical or personal, working online is not for everyone. If a client chooses not to work in this new way, possibly after giving it a try, and therefore prefers to take a break from their therapy, respect their preference. In this case, discuss with your client how they will access any support they need. When the move to online

working has not worked out, we strongly advise against charging them for sessions missed without giving notice.

When face-to-face work can be resumed

It is important to follow UK Government advice. Currently this is to work from home where ever possible. This means continuing to work remotely. It is not possible to give definitive criteria for when it would be appropriate to resume face to face work if restrictions are slackened but, in general terms, the well-being and safety of the client should be the paramount consideration.

Some factors to consider are: the safety of both parties, risk to client if therapy is discontinued, age and pre-existing health condition of both parties, risk to clients from travelling, what other options are available

Adapting to working online

1. Self-care

It is very widely reported that working online is more tiring than working face-to-face. There is something more intense, perhaps due to the absence of many non-verbal cues that we are used to relying on. You may therefore need a longer gap between sessions, and you may want to schedule specific time for rest or exercise to 'unwind' after a series of sessions. For more about why online working is so tiring, with tips for managing this, see <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200421-why-zoom-video-chats-are-so-exhausting?ocid=ww.social.link.linkedin>

2. New ways of working

Our counselling or psychotherapy practice will inevitably change when it goes online. While our work is always naturally developing, online working will call us to adjust, adapt and develop our work in new and unexpected ways. It is also important to remember that some clients prefer a remote setting, finding it to be more facilitative.

Some practitioners have already offered their experience of insights into working online:

(A) Free webinar re working remotely (1hr 10mins)

Although pitched towards sensorymotor working, Pat Ogden and Bonnie Goldstein exploration of practical aspects of working with clients during the coronavirus pandemic, may be of general interest. *Sensorimotor Psychotherapy from a Distance: Engaging the Body, Creating Presence, and Building Relationship In Online Therapy*. https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_XH_dOoZPSySXMHFDWkc2zw

(B) YouTube interview (32 mins)

(C) Confer have made this interview available free of charge. Jungian psychotherapist Judith Anderson is being interviewed by Alice Waterfall. Again this may be of interest to all practitioners as Judith addresses many aspects of her online work that we can all relate to, whichever our modality.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_bEe9JOU0

This pandemic has called us to work online, remote from our clients. We are all learning and adjusting to these new restrictions and opportunities. If you have found anything online that has been helpful for you in developing your work online, please do send an email to admin@ahpp.org.uk including the link to the resource. We can then add more resources to this page for members. Thank you.