

ADVICE FOR REMOTE WORKING IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

A brief reference sheet for main considerations in line with BPS guidance



Note: This is a brief resource, focusing on the main generic tips for remote working in Clinical Psychology. For more specific issues, such as risk, safeguarding and software advice, a further document will be compiled and released in due course.

A message of support

This is a strange time for Clinical Psychology. One of the core activities of our profession is delivering evidence-based therapies face-to-face to those in need. In these unprecedented circumstances, many clinical psychologists are confronted with the prospect of delivering therapy remotely. Some of us may feel comfortable doing this but for many, the idea may seem daunting. Most importantly, you are not alone, so please do reach out to others who can provide you with the professional and emotional support you need during this time.

Skills you already have

Remote working will seem very strange at first. There are some experiences that naturally occur within the therapeutic relationship that may no longer be available to us. However, there are many that will still exist, which means most of our skills will be useful when working remotely. It may be helpful to remind yourself of these skills:

Curiosity	Active listening
Empathy	Reflection
Containment	Summarising
Agenda management	Holding silence

Tips for remote working

There are many general issues to consider before, during and after remote therapy sessions. You will not be able to pick up on non-verbal cues from the client if you are using the telephone, so will have to concentrate more on the verbal cues. For all media, you will find useful tips on the next page in an easy-reference table. Please regularly familiarise yourself with these tips, even if you become more experienced at remote therapy. Telephone-only tips are in red text, audiovisual is in blue, and tips for both are in black.

Self-care and supervision

Working alone can feel isolating. Be sure to schedule time for lunch, permissible social interaction, and short periods of rest. Remember that this is your home environment and you do not want to make it a place of stress. Always keep water on your desk and a snack handy if that helps! If you are used to working in a team, it can be difficult getting advice or support from others. Make sure you have everyone's contact details to hand and try setting up 'daily huddles' to catch up and discuss the things you normally would in passing in your usual place of work. WhatsApp, Google Groups and similar apps may be of help with this. You may need to set up more regular and longer supervision to deal with the added aspect of remote working and its challenges, especially as you cannot just seek ad hoc advice.

Resources and further reading

- A Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner (PWP), known as 'Not a Low Intensity Guru', has posted a useful blog on remote working: <https://bit.ly/2UfUoVX>
- The British Psychological Society (BPS) has released guidelines: <http://bit.ly/3dc3dHG>
- A Dropbox folder pools several resources for remote working, covering specific issues, such as confidentiality and risk: <https://bit.ly/3dnqV3L>

Before	During	Ending/after
<p>E-MAILS Ensure you have an e-mail address for the client in order to send resources more easily. Set boundaries around your e-mail contact availability.</p>	<p>CONFIDENTIALITY Ask the client to confirm it is them before you give details about what service you are calling from. Come up with a password if that helps.</p>	<p>REFLECT TOGETHER Reflect on how it went with the client – individual preferences are more apparent with remote working.</p>
<p>CONTACT DETAILS Check that you have the correct contact details and get an alternative contact if possible. Block the 'Caller ID' on your phone. Get permission to leave voicemails.</p>	<p>USE METAPHORS Without visual cues, it's hard to explain concepts. Use easy-to-understand metaphors; for example, a 'clock face with numbers' for a hot-cross bun.</p>	<p>TAKE TIME TO END Spend longer than usual ending the session. Leaving a face-to-face therapy session is very different from putting down the phone or ending the video call.</p>
<p>CREATE A PROFILE Make professional information about you available to your client e.g. a picture, a bio, etc.</p>	<p>VOLUME AND NOISE Check that the client can hear you properly by doing a quick microphone check at the start. Beware of noise in your working environment.</p>	<p>CHECK UNDERSTANDING Check the client has understood everything and ask them to summarise.</p>
<p>CONSIDER ABILITIES Can the client read and write? Are they hard-of-hearing? You might need to make adjustments.</p>	<p>RESOURCES Check that the client has a pen and paper to hand, and has printed out/has the resources you've sent.</p>	<p>REMAIN BOUNDARIED clients may feel they can call at any time as you're more accessible – remind them of the contract.</p>
<p>PREPARE RESOURCES Does the client have a printer/scanner? Ask them to scan homework and send it to you if they can. Send all materials for the session beforehand via email or post.</p>	<p>AGENDA AND TIMING Set a clear agenda and stick to timings. It's harder to interrupt when you are not in the room with a client. What would your 'interruption' phrase be?</p>	<p>POWER IN ENDINGS When saying goodbyes and coming to the end of the session, allow the client to terminate the call.</p>
<p>PUT PRACTICALITIES IN PLACE Get a headset for phone working and a webcam for video working, unless your laptop already has a camera.</p>	<p>VERBAL FILLERS Use verbal 'fillers' to show you are listening, such as 'mmm', 'yes', etc. Check with the client whether this helps, as some may get annoyed by it.</p>	<p>E-MAIL SUMMARIES Send all the documents you have used in the session to the client's e-mail address. Briefly summarise the session if they find this useful.</p>
<p>GET ON THE SAME PAGE Create a contract that outlines what you and the client will expect during remote working, including how many times you will call without getting an answer before discharge. See our example contract template on the next page.</p>	<p>VERBAL EMPATHY Use empathic statements more as your facial expressions cannot be seen. Think about emphasis and intonation, as well as timing your empathic statements.</p>	<p>KEEP CONSISTENCY Remind the client of the contract for the next session – include the appointment time, proposed agenda, etc. Invite them to the next video meeting in advance using a link. Learn how to on 'Zoom' here: https://bit.ly/2vINkHI</p>
<p>SUITABLE ENVIRONMENT Make sure your environment is quiet, private and does not reveal more about you than you would like. You can hide your background on 'Zoom' - learn how to here: https://bit.ly/3blMnUV</p>	<p>SCREEN SHARE If you are using video, make the most of screen sharing, where clients can see your screen. This is useful for explaining models and formulating. Learn how to on 'Zoom' here: https://bit.ly/2UwXoMd</p>	<p>MAKE NOTES IMMEDIATELY Immediately make notes – it's harder to distinguish clients a while after working with them, especially after a full day.</p>
<p>PREPARE FOR PROBLEMS Put aside 5 mins before the session to check your hardware is working. Let the client know what your contingency plans are – if video doesn't work, can you use the telephone?</p>	<p>SUMMARISE IN 'CAPSULES' Summarise more than usual to check for mutual understanding. Do so after every key part of the agenda.</p>	<p>AND BREATHE... Take a moment to relax – listening on the phone or using video can be very difficult and requires a lot of concentration.</p>

Key

Telephone only = red text.

Video only = blue text.

Both = black text.

EXAMPLE Remote Working Service Client Contract
(please amend as appropriate)

Name of person: _____

Name of therapist: _____

Time and software for therapy sessions: _____

Frequency of sessions: _____

E-mail address: _____

Timing of first therapy review: _____

Guidelines

(1) Structure of therapy

Due to recent social distancing guidelines given by the Government, we will have to provide remote therapy. To deliver this, we will be using [software name]/the telephone. (If applicable) You can find instructions on how to use [software name] here: [use www.bitly.com to make a small link that fits on the page well]. This will mean several adjustments will be made:

- We will call you at a specified time using the agreed platform.
- The therapist cannot be contacted using this medium outside of these times (delete if appropriate). (Insert availability here if appropriate.)

(2) Attending appointments

- Sessions generally take place weekly/fortnightly. We usually offer [number of sessions] sessions. Sessions usually last for [time] minutes.
- Please ensure that you are in an appropriate location for therapy sessions. You should not be driving whilst receiving treatment. Please keep your environment noise-free and reduce distractions as much as possible.
- It is important for you to attend sessions at agreed times. These times are scheduled to provide you with consistency and regular support.
- We will contact you using your preferred method. At the time of the appointment, we will call you up to [number] times before we try another method. If we have tried calling you [number] times in total and you do not answer, we will assume you are not able to attend the appointment and will not call you again.
- If you need to cancel an appointment, please give us as much notice as possible. To do so, please phone [number], ideally giving at least 24 hours' notice. If we need to cancel your appointment for any reason (e.g. therapist sickness) we will contact you using your preferred method (usually mobile) giving as much notice as we are able to.

- In line with this, we have a strict cancellation and attendance policy:
 - Following [number] cancellations you will be offered a review to decide whether this is the best time to have treatment. After [number] cancellations we usually cannot offer further sessions (if applicable).
 - If you miss an appointment without giving notice on more than [number] occasion you will be discharged from our service. We will remind you of this on the first occasion that this occurs.

(3) E-mail contact

Contact outside of treatment times is limited. Your therapist will contact you for the following reasons, using an agreed e-mail address:

- To send you resources used in the session.
- To send appointment confirmations.
- For you to send copies of your work (if applicable).

If you e-mail us, we will aim to get back to you in [time].

(4) Ending treatment

- We will discuss ending treatment a few sessions before the final one. At the end of therapy we will work with you to produce a summary of important points and a plan for the future.
- You can end treatment at any stage – if you are unhappy with the therapy programme you can speak to your clinician and a review can be arranged to discuss alternative treatment options.

(5) Confidentiality

- Information shared in the sessions will be kept confidential within our service team. We like to keep the referrer (usually the GP) and other health care professionals involved in your care updated on your contact with the service by writing a short summary to them at the start and end of therapy (copied to you unless you request otherwise). If there are things that you do not wish to be included in correspondence please let your therapist know and he/she will discuss these with you.
- We respect your confidentiality and we ask you to respect ours. Please do not record sessions. We would not record sessions unless we explicitly obtain your consent.
- The only time a therapist may break confidentiality is if there is a risk of harm or neglect to yourself or another person/child.

Client Name/Signature: _____

Date: _____

Clinician Name/Signature: _____

Date: _____