



## Online Therapy Policy

M Dagge Therapy respects the privacy of its personnel, clients and outside organisations.

### Introduction

M Dagge Therapy adheres to the IACAT Code of Ethics. Currently this code is being updated and will include guidelines for both online and phone therapy.

**Until** the code is approved this document addresses some of the implications and considerations of working in this new and expanding field.

**M Dagge Therapy has notified their supervisor and insurance company that they have embarked on online engagement with clients, using Zoom and Telephone only.**

### Types of digital therapy

- **Email:** an exchange of emails with a therapist. An agreed time/day to receive and expect a response from the therapist is negotiated and set.

**EMAIL's need to be encrypted.** If emailing or sending something created by the client before or during the session, encourage the use of password protection or the use of a secure encrypted server such as Egress.

“Please ensure that when artworks are sent, they are password protected by your clients and that storage of artworks sent electronically is also password protected.”  
(BAAT, 16.03.2020)

- **Instant Message:** a specific time is agreed to have an instant relay chat (in real time) using online platforms such as What's App where messages sent and received are encrypted.

***There is some discussion about the suitability of using these due to issues of GDPR:***

“It is simply not acceptable for clients to see when you, their therapist, is or is not online, and vice versa, it is not OK for you to see when a client is or is not online.

What is great and helpful amongst families and friends is simply intolerable for psychotherapists working professionally... (ACTO), 14.08.2017)

- **Webcam via Skype, Zoom or Facetime:** conducted via a webcam camera on your computer/device, both client and therapist can see each other.

“The live chat function on either Skype or Skype for Business **does not provide a suitable level** of security for the therapeutic use as the text is still available at a later

date and could be misused (think about for example a jealous partner using tracking software)." (Association for Counselling and Therapy Online (ACTO), 14.08.2017)  
ACTO also raise the issue of cookies and how Skype and Microsoft use these across their products which may also breach GDPR.

Many of the same concerns exist if you consider using WhatsApp Video, Facebook Video or Google Hangouts.

**Zoom Video Conferencing** is recommended as a preferable Video Conferencing software as it has better features to protect client data – chat logs are not automatically stored after a call ends, screen sharing asks for more confirmation about what should be shared, and the platform is less integrated with address books meaning there are less pop up notifications relating to clients and less tracking of who is online and when.

"The bandwidth used by Zoom will be optimised for the best experience based on the participants' network. It will automatically adjust for 3G, WiFi or Wired environments.

Recommended bandwidth for Meetings:

For 1:1 video calling:

600kbps (up/down) for high quality video

1.2 Mbps (up/down) for 720p HD video

Receiving 1080p HD video requires 1.3 Mbps (up/down)

Sending 1080p HD video requires 2.8 Mbps (up/down)

(kbps - kilobits per second - Mbps - megabits per second)" (Still, 2020)

- **Telephone:** this can be a specific choice or alternative if the internet signal fails or buffers.

**Telephone is regarded as the most secure method of digital therapy.**

## Considerations

When deciding whether to offer therapy by phone or internet services you might want to consider:

The age of the clients (in particular with relation to using online tools). Clients must be at least:

16 to use WhatsApp

13 to use Facebook

13 to use Skype

13 to use Outlook email

13 to use Gmail

Old enough to consent to the legal terms of service for Zoom Video Conferencing.  
Consent from the client and their parent/guardian (for child) or carer (for vulnerable adults).  
The client's ability to engage in therapy in this way (any sensory processing issues or the clients comfort using technology)  
The technical requirements to allow the session to take place without interruption.  
The policy and guidance of any organisation you are working for or subcontracted by regarding alternative therapy provision  
The safety and confidentiality issues around this method of therapy.

### The chosen approach

- **'Synchronous'**: live and immediate, in real time, delivered via Instant Messenger [IM] or video/audio link.
- **'Asynchronous'**: the exchange of pre-considered material, usually delivered by email.  
(Source: <https://privatepracticehub.co.uk/delivering-therapy-online>)

### The assessment of client suitability for online therapy

- Assess client/s proficiency in using technology when practising online creative arts therapy.
- Consider clients/s suitability for online creative arts therapy.
- Discuss advantages and disadvantages of online creative arts therapy.
- Evaluate client/s ability to communicate when undertaking online creative arts therapy.
- Consider any circumstances and/or conditions that may impact understanding of, the obtaining informed consent when securing informed consent at a distance and also from a parent/guardian when providing online services to a child or vulnerable person ages under 18.
- Re-contract with your client/s to address the circumstance driven change to working online.

## Ethics

- Make sure that purpose, type and duration of online therapy are clearly defined.
- Obtain and document informed consent when providing professional services online, adhering to IACATS's code of ethics. Include the way in which you will work with your client/s online and how you will respond to electronic based communications from clients. Within the consent form also include information about the potential charges/or fee reduction incurred for any service interruptions or failures should they occur and awareness of charges on exceeding monthly data plans.
- Explain to clients how you will interact with them using the specific technologies involved. Be mindful of GDPR legislation and include what client information will be stored and for how long, how the information will be stored, how it will be accessed.

*See sample here:*

<https://www.counsellingonline.ie/iocps-irish-online-counselling-psychotherapy-service/terms-of-use>

## Confidentiality

- Discuss the specific issues related to working online surrounding confidentiality and consider the client/s environment. For example, does the clients living situation mean that they are likely to be disturbed during an online session? To ensure that the conversation can't be overheard by other people in the same building, the use of headphones by both client and therapist is advised.

## Technical Issues

- Be clear about the technical issues that may arise during an online session. Establish whether both your own and your clients internet connection is sufficient prior to proceeding with online creative arts therapy. Establish a pre-arranged agreement as to how to resume communication if a technology breakdown occurs, for example by telephone within a specific time frame.

Also consider the use of art materials and the potential safety implications of their proximity to laptops/keyboards.

## Insurance

- If you are thinking of providing online creative art's therapy services first check with your insurer that you are covered.

## Finance

- For your own and your client's protection, it is advisable to have secure arrangements in place for the transfer of money, for example, PayPal. It is usual practice for payment to be made before an online session takes place.
- There may be considerations around fair pricing for offering online or phone sessions: "Do not charge your clients if you are unable to provide your usual psychotherapeutic support and they do not accept other arrangements you offer.
- Consider the fee arrangements you have in place with your clients and explore whether these still apply in your client's absence and if so, how it may affect your psychotherapeutic relationship with your client." (UKCP, 2020)
- The BAAT and BAMT have recommended offering a reduced rate for sessions: "Phone and online session will cost the usual rate minus room hire and art materials costs and paid as agreed in the contract." (BAAT, 16.03.2020)

## Session Times

Where possible, sessions should be arranged to take place at the clients usual time for their regular face to face sessions. In some cases, adjustments may need to be made to find a time when the client is able to have the privacy to make the call from their own home.

## Use of recording – audio and video

Audio or video data is not recommended to be recorded by therapist or client. However, should a situation arise and both parties agree to a recording the client will be informed before sessions begin and a separate consent form will be used to give permission for such recordings.

**Recommended wording for video therapy contracting with clients**

Choose a room that is private for the online therapy to take place in, away from distractions and interruptions so you can get the most out of the session and to adhere to confidentiality guidelines. The use of headphones is recommended. Use Wifi that is secure (password protected).

I will email you a meeting code and password before the session. Should you not receive the code please email or text me and I will re-send the information.

Once you have the code and password launch Zoom. At the agreed time press

Join and enter the code/password. The meeting will then begin with audio and video link.

Turning off Wifi from any other devices using the same Wifi source as the therapy meeting, including mobile phones, just before the session starts can enhance the internet connection. Shutting down anything that may be using the internet in the background of the device you are using before the session starts can also aid internet connection and stability.

Should the internet connection fail I will contact you via email (if you can access email via your mobile phone) or text you on your designated mobile phone and suggest the following:

1) We come out of the Zoom meeting. Close down Zoom and re-open. I will send a new code/password and start a new meeting.

2) If this does not address the internet connection issues we can continue over the phone, in which case I will call you on your designated phone number.

## References

Evans, J. (2009). *Online Counselling and Guidance Skills: A Practical Resource for Trainees and Practitioners*. London: Sage Publications.

Dunn, K. (2019) *Delivering Therapy Online*. (Retrieved 16/03/2020)

<https://privatepracticehub.co.uk/delivering-therapy-online>

American Psychological Association (APA) Available at:

<https://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/telepsychology> (Retrieved 14/03/2020)

Association for Counselling and Therapy Online: <https://acto-org.uk/> (Retrieved 14/03/2020)

Private Practice Hub: <https://privatepracticehub.co.uk/delivering-therapy-online>  
(Retrieved 16/03/2020)

British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy:

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/contact-us/faqs-about-coronavirus/> (Retrieved 16/03/2020)

## RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Association for Counselling and Therapy Online: <https://acto-org.uk/>

American Psychological Association (APA) Available at:

<https://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/telepsychology>

British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy:

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/contact-us/faqs-about-coronavirus/>

<https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>

Irish Online Counselling

<https://www.counsellingonline.ie/iocps-irish-online-counselling-psychotherapy-service/terms-of-use>

Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy:

<https://iacp.ie/onlinecounselling>