

GUIDANCE

Guidance for providers of school and community based counselling services: coronavirus

Information for providers of counselling services for children and young people during the coronavirus pandemic.

Part of: Safeguarding: coronavirus

First published: 11 June 2020

Last updated: 11 June 2020

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We know that continuing concerns over the coronavirus pandemic mean that local authority counselling leads and providers across Wales are having to think carefully and increasingly innovatively about how best to support their clients during this uncertain and continuing period of unprecedented change.

Each counselling situation is unique and the decision on how best to continue to support children and young people is a complex process and must include a consideration of general therapist competence and comfort with the proposed medium combined with client safety, age, understanding and their comfort with the proposed medium.

With the above in mind we thought it may be helpful to compile a list of FAQs to help counselling services make the right decision for them, their clients and their future service provision, ensuring that counselling services are working ethically and effectively throughout.

What is the current government guidance on the use of face to face counselling?

In light of the general Government advice to continue to stay at home unless absolutely necessary, the United Kingdom Council for psychotherapy (UKCP) has strongly advised that wherever possible clients and therapists do not risk theirs' and others' health by delivering/receiving therapy face-to-face where other options are available. Therapists must apply their professional judgement and refer to their insurers and, where applicable, their employers. We would concur with this advice.

Once the Covid-19 restrictions are relaxed and some limited face to face counselling resumes, what precautions should I take?

There are many simple steps you can take based on existing advice, such as:

- Practice social distancing. Keep at least two metres away from clients (particularly during extended periods, i.e. over 10 minutes). Avoid hand-shaking or other physical contact.
- Wash your hands thoroughly before and after each client.
- Regularly disinfect door handles, hand-rests of chairs, computers, laptops, phones, writing implements etc. between clients.
- Make sure tissues are available to clients (if they weren't already) so they can practice the mantra "catch it, bin it, kill it". Pre-divide tissues into batches so that you can provide clients with their own portion – don't have one central box of tissues that could become contaminated.
- If you provide a bin for tissues, make sure it is emptied between clients and use appropriate measures to prevent yourself from coming in contact with the contents – or ask clients to take their tissues home and dispose of them themselves.
- Air out the consulting room where possible by opening windows etc.
- Use your judgement: if you have any doubts about your own health or that of your client, take the appropriate steps. This may include self-isolation and sign-posting clients to other appropriate resources.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, counselling providers must maintain close contact with their LA service commissioners and liaise with them before resuming face to face counselling sessions.

Where can I find the most up to date information relating to the Covid-19 pandemic from a Welsh perspective?

We are advising people who are looking for information about the virus to visit the [Public Health Wales](#) website, where you will find the most up-to-date information, including what to do if you are worried you might have symptoms, advice for travellers and common questions. The [Gov.Wales](#) website also has up to date information about the situation in Wales.

BACP has issued a [FAQ about coronavirus](#), offering guidance based on therapist questions. As well as signposting members to the NHS and Government guidance on coronavirus, they provide practical tips on running a counselling service during the pandemic. In it, they stress the importance of weighing up your ethical duty to put clients first with the potential risks against your own well-being and health.

What are the main considerations before undertaking remote counselling with children and young people?

Remote counselling must involve close collaboration between all concerned with the care of the child or young person, with careful consideration of a range of issues. The UKCP has provided [guidance](#) for outlining such considerations when moving to remote working with existing young clients during the coronavirus crisis. The Association for Counselling and Therapy Online (ACTO) has also recently published updated [guidance](#) on security and privacy while providing online counselling provision.

How can I ensure my remote counselling service is as responsive and adaptive as possible during the current Covid-19 pandemic?

The BACP has created FAQs for working online with children and young people will help you make informed choices and decisions that are in the best interests of your young clients. BACP has also created a [CPD hub](#) which members can use to continue to develop their existing competence and knowledge.

The Welsh Government also produces quarterly [Youth Work Bulletins](#). In the light of the Covid-19 pandemic they have produced a special edition which contains useful information on moving services online and also hints and tips on safeguarding.

The National Counselling Society provides [useful information for trainees as well as practising therapists](#). As well as offering suggestions to assist with working through this period, they encourage you to:

"Communicate with all clients and inform them that their sessions could be liable to postponement or disruption on a temporary basis."

Where can I find help and advice about training for remote counselling?

In the short term, when attending training is not practically or even financially possible, BACP [recommend a number of actions](#) to help counsellors gain the basic knowledge and skills necessary to practise ethically online or over the phone in the short term.

The [Online Therapy Institute](#) also provides 8-10 hours of training, created specifically to help mental health professionals keep going in the short term, although it does not provide sufficient training for accreditation as an online therapist.

In the longer term, if you're able to access training, you may wish to consider looking at [courses offered by ACTO](#).

Counselling services should also take heed of the Welsh Government's [school and community-based counselling operating toolkit](#), (the final version of which will publish shortly), in particular the section on online counselling.

Do you have an up to date list of voluntary or other organisations specialising in the provision of bereavement support for children and young people?

The following is a list of organisations providing bereavement support which you may wish to refer clients onto:

- [Apartofme](#) provides young people with a safe space to grieve, where they can hear from others who know how it feels and find strength and wisdom
- [Child Bereavement UK](#) supports families both when a child dies or is dying, and when a child is facing bereavement.
- [Grief Encounter](#) supports bereaved children and their families to help alleviate the pain caused by the death of someone close.
- [Hope Again](#) is Cruse Bereavement Care's website for young people. It is a safe place where they can learn from other young people, how to cope with grief, and feel less alone.
- [Winston's Wish](#) supports children and young people after the death of a parent or sibling.

What special considerations should I have in mind when providing counselling services for deaf children and young people?

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) stresses the importance of ensuring that deaf children and young (NDCS) are made aware of their right to access virtual appointments with communication support.

Booking of appointments should be available to be made by text or email as well as over the phone. You may be able to arrange for remote speech to text reporters or sign language interpreters to join a video call. It is helpful to ensure that information on how to facilitate (and fund) this is made readily available to those operating the systems. [WITS Wales](#) or [Interpretnow](#) are two systems that may be of use.

Providing deaf children and young people with clear and accessible information relating to Covid-19 will help alleviate their fears and support their mental health. The National Deaf Children's Society is working on a list of resources that will be available shortly. In the meantime, their website [The Buzz](#) contains information specifically for young people.

What other support is available for children and young people who need support with their mental health?

Many people will find staying at home difficult, but there are lots of ways to help support your mental health. Children and young people should tell a trusted adult how they are feeling and talk to them about ways they can support children and young people's mental health.

In recognition that so many young people are finding the current situation challenging, and to support them during this testing time, we have created an online resource which promotes the numerous digital tools designed specifically to support young people with their own mental health and emotional wellbeing.

The [Young Person's Mental Health Toolkit](#) links young people, aged 11 to 25, from the Hwb to a wide range of online resources that can support young people through the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. In each of the six sections there are up to ten self-help websites, apps, helplines, and more which support mental health and wellbeing.

The NHS is still here to help too and so children and young people should still access support through your GP if they need to.

First published

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