ACTO Competences

Why these are important and what to look for in training that enables ACTO membership

In line with the real-world qualifications, training to work therapeutically online is available from a number of sources and organisations. Training packages may include some but not all of these recommended skills and requirements of an online therapist.
ACTO does not endorse or suggest any particular training route, however we do believe that to be accepted as a member in ACTO professional members need to meet a minimum requirement at Diploma level or above. The following competences would need to be met by a training provider. These can then evidence eligibility to join ACTO.
ACTO recommends fulfilling all of the learning outcomes listed to ensure safe, ethical and professional standards in online therapy. The following competencies have been adapted from the **learning outcomes** listed in Stokes (2016) and relate to all the four mediums of:

- Video
- Telephone / VoIP
- IM/Chat
- Email

N.B. Where the terms "client" and "patient" are mentioned, these can be interchanged with the appropriate terminology used within your mental health profession.

1. Introduction to online therapy.

- Understand what online therapy is.
- Reflect on what online therapy means for you as a practitioner.
- Be aware of issues faced in online therapy when working across international time-zones.
- Be fully versed with the ethical aspects of providing online therapy, including from an international perspective.

2. Psychological Processes relevant to online therapy.

- Critically understand the ways in which the technological environment can encourage disinhibition for both client/patient and therapist and ways in which this will have a significant impact on the therapeutic process.
- Be able to draw on knowledge of ways in which disinhibited clients can be helped to pace their communications in a way that is conducive to their ability to process material.
- Be able to draw on an awareness that client/patient and therapist may need to be reminded of the technological environment to avoid inappropriate and inaccurate fantasies and/or assumptions of each other.
- A thorough practical understanding of writing as the medium for therapy.
- A practical ability to manage attachment and rejection in the context of providing online therapy.
- Knowledge of the culture of internet communities.

3. Assessment of clients/patients for online therapy.

- Assess clients' /patients' competence in use of technology when practising online therapy.
- Assess clients'/patients' attitude and suitability for online therapy.
- Discuss advantages and disadvantages of online therapy.
- Assess psychological and physical client/patient difficulties that may affect effective use of online therapy and be able to recommend appropriate software support.
- Evaluate clients' ability to communicate when undertaking online therapy.
- Assess clients'/patients' suitability for text-based counselling.

4. Contracting and Boundaries for online therapy.

- Be able to agree a contract with clients/patients when embarking on online therapy.

- Understand ways in which to establish client/patient identity and establish suitable boundaries around own identity.

5. Communication in online therapy.

- To have a thorough knowledge of communicating using written text and be able to draw on this knowledge in practice.
- To have an in-depth ability to communicate using audio-visual technology.

6. Text-Based Communication and Creativity in online therapy.

- To have a thorough understanding of the impact of the use of asynchronous and synchronous text-based communication.
- To be able to use creativity within **online therapy.**

7. Managing Risk and Safeguarding Issues presenting during online

- Demonstrate knowledge of risk indicators when visual cues are not present.
- Make effective use of risk assessment measures when practicing online therapy and be able to continually assess risk throughout.
- Have a thorough knowledge of, and be able to articulate, ways of working with suicidal clients/patients.
- Manage work with clients/patients at risk, including additional support.
- Develop internal and external strategies for managing impact of risk on self.

8. Providing online therapy across International and State boundaries.

- Take account of the legal and professional issues and insurance consequences of working across international and state jurisdictions, including the implications for the online therapeutic contract.
- Appreciate social, cultural, linguistic and temporal consequences on the therapeutic relationship, of providing online therapy internationally.

- Consider the effects of providing online therapy internationally or inter-State, on issues of risk and safeguarding
- Consider and assess social, legal, privacy and internet-security risks to a client/patient when providing online therapy internationally and know how to research such risks.

9. Endings and Supervision in online therapy.

- Manage ending a relationship with clients when providing online therapy.
- To be able to evaluate risk when ending online therapy and have knowledge of further resources of support to offer clients.
- To have knowledge of asynchronous endings and the implications of this for therapeutic practice.
- To be able to agree the supervision contract relating to online therapy, to include being able to identify the optimal way for the supervisor to access clinical material.
- Have an ability to reflect on the impact of online therapy on the client/patient and therapist.

10. Data protection governed by GDPR relating to Counselling and Psychotherapy online.

- To be able to use the Law and Regulations of Data Protection, which includes GDPR, PECR, ePR and Privacy.
- To be able to manage best practice of cybersecurity to comply with operational and technical measures to protect data.
- Be aware of risks associated with using digital technology and how this relates to the above.
- Comply with electronic communications regulations for provision of services to clients/patients.

Adapted from Stokes (2016)

Reference

Stokes, A. (1st February 2016) *Telephone and E-Counselling Training Curriculum. A research-based curriculum framework for telephone and e-counselling. BACP Professional Standards.*

https://www.bacp.co.uk/media/2046/bacp-telephone-ecounselling-training-curriculum.pdf Last accessed 12-12-19