



Recommendations and Reminders for Counsellors in the face of COVID-19

[It is your responsibility to remain informed and follow all requirements of provincial and federal governments](#)

A. Reduce Risk – Practice the stated instructions of social-distancing and other safety measures that will reduce risk and protect the people around you. Social distancing is being credited as the overall most potent measure we have for reducing the speed of the transmission thereby reducing the strain on our health care systems and care providers. It is our civil duty to remain informed and in compliance to voices of wisdom.

<https://www.who.int/> <https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/social-distancing>

B. Communication and Cancellations

Safety First –This means caring for yourself and your family, your clients and staff and their families as well. It is imperative that we respect and adhere to governmental instructions! If you have a client in crisis, and through the process of ethical decision-making choose to book an in-person session, it is critical that you ensure adequate screening of the client’s health prior to booking the appointment. Ensure efficient cleaning and disinfecting of all surfaces with generous supplies of hand sanitizer and Kleenex and garbage disposal units are accessible. Practice vigorous wand-washing in between clients and when coming and going to your office space. Respect the public parameters established by health laws and defer to tele-counselling or other secure means of e-therapy using electronic platforms that meet the standards described below.

Scheduling – Examine your policies and procedures around scheduling and cancellations and consider how they may need to be edited to meet the situations arising with COVID-19. Ensure excellent communication regarding these with compassionate implementation.

C. Professional Liability Insurance and Legal Counsel

Ensure you understand the terms and benefits of your own policy. Your policy with [McFarlan Rowlands](#) provides pro-bono legal counsel and provides coverage for tele-counselling and e-therapy. However, it is essential that you know and abide by all regulations governing the provinces and territories in which you provide mental health services. Also, it is required that you keep your insurance company informed of all international clients maintaining compliance with the applicable regulations and laws for those jurisdictions. Confirm and never assume the details of your coverage with your insurance provider and abide strictly by the terms.

D. Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Special considerations about consent – There are additional factors that need to be included in the informed consent for tele counselling and/or e-therapy. The client must consent to the session being conducted on a web-based or telephone platform and be informed of additional risks and potential limitations that could occur such as: an interruption in telephone or internet services or breach of privacy at the location of the client. The following are vital to know and document: physical location of the client, phone number, email address and a safety plan if disconnection or medical emergency occurs.



Special considerations when working out of office – There are additional steps to take to secure privacy and confidentiality for your client work when working out of your counselling office. Here are some great guidelines:

[Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada](#)

[Office of the Information & Privacy Commissioner for BC.](#)

E. Ethics and Compliance:

The onus of responsibility for creating privacy and confidentiality always belong to the counsellor. Reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that the electronic platform being utilized is secure and confidential. The quality of connectivity, audio and video need to be secured by the counsellor. Clients need to be informed of their own responsibility for privacy and confidentiality where they are during the session with the counsellor. Documented informed consent for e-therapy must be secured before session begins. When choosing tools to use in session, ensure compliance with all provincial and territorial [privacy laws](#), such as [PIPA](#) in BC and [PIPEDA](#) standards across Canada.

Social media platforms are not secure or compliant technologies to be used for counselling therapy. The following are a few compliant platforms approved for providing on-line mental health services.

www.doxy.me

www.thera-link.com

www.vsee.com

www.zoom.us

www.oncallhealth.ca

<https://www.bluejeans.com>

F. Self-Care and Health:

Create and commit to scheduled times of [self-care](#) and make them priority. Stay self-aware and self-assess personal stress levels while focusing on prevention of burn-out. Plan activities of relaxation that rejuvenate and maintain life-work balance. Consult and debrief with colleagues. Stay intentionally connected to family and community.