

Covid-19 Response for Dramatherapists.

This guidance is for Dramatherapists on how to respond to Covid-19, AKA Coronavirus.

This guidance is based on similar guidance released by:

- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)
- UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)
- British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT)
- British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT)
- AXA Healthcare
- Government and NHS guidance.

As Public Health advice changes rapidly, we will update our guideline accordingly.

The guidance covers five areas:

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1. Clear information

Covid-19 is a rapidly developing global pandemic. Official guidance is changing on a daily basis; sometimes more frequently than that.

It is important to discuss this with clients:

"Many of our clients will feel anxious about their circumstances, including the impact of the pandemic on their therapy. Sharing some information clearly with clients will help contain some of this anxiety" (BAAT, 16.03.2020)

- Be transparent about how you are following current guidance.
- Discuss what may happen if one or both of you needs to self-isolate, or if government policy changes to limit face to face therapeutic interactions. It is likely that this will affect your sessions.
- Inform clients of statutory sources of crisis support where appropriate.
- Ensure clients are aware of official infection control advice.
- There is no indication how long this will last.
- Be clear about what alternative arrangements can be offered (if any) and the practicalities around this (financial and logistical).
- Discuss how you will maintain communication if sessions stop (e.g. if they are isolating for 7 days, how will you contact them towards the end of this time to get a health update and rearrange sessions).

2. Prevention of infection.

It is important that dramatherapists take steps to prevent infection

2.1. Hand Washing

Where face to face sessions continue, please ensure you are following official hand washing advice, using soap and water for 20 seconds or where this is not available, using an alcohol based gel and ensuring this has dried.

It is recommended hands should be washed at the start and at the end of every session.

2.2. Self-Isolation

If someone is unwell with any of the symptoms of Covid-19, the official advice is to self-isolate. Self-isolation involves staying at home and not receiving visitors other than people who are dropping off supplies.

“Stay at home for 7 days if you have either:

- a high temperature – you feel hot to touch on your chest or back
- a new, continuous cough – this means you've started coughing repeatedly

Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital.

You do not need to contact 111 to tell them you're staying at home.

Testing for coronavirus is not needed if you're staying at home.” (NHS, 13.03.2020)

“if you have symptoms of coronavirus infection (COVID-19), however mild, do not leave your home for 7 days from when your symptoms started... Do not invite or allow social visitors, such as friends and family, to enter your home. If you want to speak to someone who is not a member of your household, use the phone or social media...

You should remain at home until 7 days after the onset of your symptoms. After 7 days, if you feel better and no longer have a high temperature, you can return to your normal routine. If you have not had any signs of improvement and have not already sought medical advice, contact NHS 111 online. If you have no internet access, call NHS 111.

Coughing may persist for several weeks in some people, despite the coronavirus infection having cleared. A persistent cough alone does not mean you must continue to self-isolate for more than 7 days.” (Public Health England, 12.03.2020)

People who are most vulnerable to the severe effects of Covid-19 may soon be asked to self-isolate for longer:

“by this coming weekend – it will be necessary to go further and to ensure that those with the most serious health conditions are largely shielded from social contact for around 12 weeks.” (Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, 16.03.2020)

2.3. Social Distancing

Where social isolation is not possible due to a clients particular needs for care, the guidance is for social distancing: People with symptoms are strongly advised not to have any physical contact with others (including hand shaking) and to maintain a distance of at least 2m from others in their home.

2.4. Continuing Group Sessions?

Currently, none of the published government guidance prohibits group gatherings. In a speech given on 16 March 2020 the Prime Minister said:

“now is the time for everyone to stop non-essential contact with others and to stop all unnecessary travel.

We need people to start working from home where they possibly can. And you should avoid pubs, clubs, theatres and other such social venues....

Now, this advice about avoiding all unnecessary social contact, is particularly important for people over 70, for pregnant women and for those with some health conditions." (Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street; The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, 16.03.2020)

Where therapists are running groups they should consider:

- The size of the group and the risks associated with this size of gathering (bearing in mind social distancing guidance for the room size and session content)
- The vulnerability of the group members (older adults, pregnant women, people with underlying health conditions including diabetes, asthma, lung disease, compromised immune systems)
- The risks associated with travel to and from the group.
- The environment used for the group; outdoor environmental arts therapy sessions may be safer than indoor sessions where practical.
- The risk associated with not holding the group for these clients and if that risk could be met in other ways.

Our colleagues at BAAT suggest not holding group sessions:

"As many of our clients have complex health conditions, BAAT does not recommend continuing group sessions at the time of this guideline. If working with children in groups, it is often difficult to ensure that even with handwashing before and after the session, contamination from runny noses, etc, will be not be spread onto art materials and other surfaces.

We therefore recommend providing holding sessions for group members, in the same way as you would do if putting a group together for the first time and waiting to have enough clients to start. These holding sessions can be done by phone or online and are usually no longer than 10 to 15 minutes long, weekly or fortnightly depending on the group setting and the client group.

We suggest they include a short information update from you (see item 1) and a space for the clients to give you some update on how they are doing. If you have any serious concerns about their safety and wellbeing, you may have to put in place a Safeguarding procedure. However, holding sessions have been an excellent way to make clients feel held in mind, cared for and contained until resumption of therapy as normal.

Holding sessions are charged on a pro rata basis of the individual fee recommended by BAAT (£50 to £70 per hour, so £12.50 to £17.50 for 15 minutes) and if working as self-employed within an organisation, they should be informed that you are following your professional body's advice to ensure their clients' health and wellbeing until resumption of normal services and that you will be invoicing accordingly." (BAAT, 16.03.2020)

2.5. Disinfecting equipment

Any equipment used within sessions may need to be disinfected or washed between sessions, particularly if used between clients.

“Clean and disinfect regularly touched objects and surfaces using your regular cleaning products to reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people.” (Public Health England, 16.03.2020)

Our friends in BAAT give this specific guidance for art supplies:

- Providing each client with their own pack of art materials (including a selection of paper) so these are not shared out.
- Ensuring that if clay is used, it is prepared in individual portions rather than taken by hand from a bag.
- Disinfecting equipment and other surfaces between sessions” (BAAT, 16.03.2020)

Where fabric resources are used such as costumes or den making, consider more frequent laundry cycles where possible.

“Do not shake dirty laundry; this minimises the possibility of dispersing virus through the air.

Wash items as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an ill person can be washed with other people’s items.

If you do not have a washing machine, wait a further 72 hours after your 7-day isolation period has ended before taking your laundry to a laundrette.” (Public Health England, 12.03.2020)

3. Alternative provisions if isolating from face to face therapy sessions.

3.1. Therapist sickness or absence

What usual arrangements are in place for a therapist sickness? Are there alternative therapists or colleagues who can offer sessions in your absence? Make use of all current arrangements for sickness cover where this is possible.

3.2. Reducing isolation

People need human connections to maintain their mental health; the isolation of Covid 19 could have a profound impact on some clients.

- “make sure that you keep in touch with friends and family over the phone or through social media
- think about things you can do during your time at home. People who have successfully completed a period of staying at home have kept themselves busy with activities such as cooking, reading, online learning and watching films

- when you are feeling better, remember that physical exercise can be good for your wellbeing. Look for online classes or courses to help you take light exercise in your home” (Public Health England, 12.03.2020)

3.3. When to offer telephone or internet-based therapy sessions

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 (see 4.1).

3.4. Providing a safe therapeutic space

When arranging remote therapy sessions by phone or video link, the therapist should give some consideration to the safety of both the room they are in and the room the client may be in.

Does the client have room to move around safely without risk of fall or injury?

Does the client have access to materials to use within the therapy?

The client will need to take ultimate responsibility for ensuring their room is safe; the therapist needs to be confident that the client is able to appropriately assess risk and mitigate potential harm to create that safe environment.

3.5. 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.

3.6. Session costs

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)

3.7. International sessions

If offering sessions internationally, it is important to ensure that your qualification is recognised by and you are licenced to practice in both the country you are operating from and the country your client is based in. It is also important to ensure your insurance will cover you to deliver the online therapy internationally.

If the client is based in America you would need to have permission for the specific State. Please check local guidance.

This would also apply if your usually British based client were calling you from abroad.

4. Technology for video or telephone based sessions

4.1. Considering confidentiality and data protection

Can the client be overheard or observed from the room they are in? If so what effect might this have on the therapy?

What are the data policies for the specific application used? Is the data encrypted? Who owns the data and in what circumstances might this be shared with third parties including the police?

4.1.1. Phone Sessions or Video Sessions

When choosing whether to offer phone sessions or video sessions as an alternative to face to face sessions, you need to consider which would be most suitable for the client and sessions.

“If you have instruments you may wish to bring them to your room with you, and you may wish to consider singing. Please bear in mind, though, that music making over the phone can feel more difficult than music making in person, so you may feel you would rather talk for the whole session - if so, that is ok.” (Rizkallah , 2020)

“Explain the difference between phone and online sessions (the latter enable you to see each other and for art making to happen) and give your clients a choice of which they would prefer which may depend on their living circumstances (it may be more

difficult to find a safe space for artmaking than to find a private space for a phone conversation)...

You can choose to email an artwork done in advance of the session (this will be the case if doing a phone session) or to do an artwork as part of an online session.” (BAAT, 16.03.2020)

4.1.2. Video Sessions: Skype or Zoom?

There is some discussion about the suitability of using Skype or Microsoft Teams due to issues of GDPR:

“We simply cannot continue to ignore the obvious. For example, as we will see in much more details below in item 2, 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. The issue is not limited to Skype, VSee has the same dependence on contacts lists.

What is great and helpful amongst families and friends is simply intolerable for psychotherapists working professionally...

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.

Other advice takes a less black and white approach to the use of Skype and suggest the importance is in clients giving informed consent to the risks:

“I spoke very recently to the Ethics team at BACP who have assured me that as long as we make clear to students that we are using Skype and cannot 100% guarantee security because we are using a third party, and that the students agree to take this (very small) risk, then this is an ethical stance. They were also happy to hear that we have tried to get the students to take responsibility for the security of their communications online with us. They reminded me that the legal requirements for a company (or for us) to give access to internet records, should the police request it in certain extreme circumstances, would obviously mean that we could not offer a complete guarantee of security.” (Oxford Uni counselling service)

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.

4.1.1. Password Protection or Encryption

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)

4.2. Technical requirements for video therapy

“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 and Webinar Panelists:

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)

Please set this up before our initial supervision session and make sure the device you will be using for supervision has up to date security software, is able to support Zoom and the bandwidth required for a stable web meeting.” (Still, 2020)

4.3. Recommended wording for video therapy contracting with clients:

“Choose a room that is private for the online supervision 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. Using headphones aids confidentiality. 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 supervision 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 supervision 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 for supervision 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.

Supervisee designated phone number:....." (Still, 2020)

"Method of Supervision

- Supervision using Synchronous (Real Time) Technologies
- Text/Audio/Whiteboard/Video Web Conferencing/
- The supervision occurs via the internet using a mixed medium of text, audio, whiteboard in real time conversation.
- Supervision using Asynchronous (Time Delayed) Technologies
- Email
- The supervision will also utilise e-mail exchanges to received process notes and supporting media attachments from supervisee when appropriate (e.g. still or moving images) prior to session. E-mail will also be utilised for administration (planning and scheduling of sessions, cancellation etc) to complement scheduled synchronous sessions.

I agree to provide online supervision through the use of e-mail and internet audio/video conferencing and white board as and when appropriate. Zoom will be the application of choice. We will agree and make arrangement on the number of online supervision sessions that you would like to contract at any given period. This will be reviewed regularly.

The synchronous audio/video conference session will last the duration of 1 hour." (Still, Arrangement for Online Supervision, 2020)

5. Financial considerations re loss of income.

Many dramatherapists may find their incomes reduced due to loss of client sessions during this time.

The government has offered the following advice:

5.1. "Sick pay

Will my employer be obliged to pay me while I stay at home?

Statutory Sick Pay will be paid from day 1 instead of day 4 for those affected by coronavirus.

5.2. What about if I have a zero hours contract?

You may be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay. Check with your employer if you're unsure.

If you're not entitled to Statutory Sick Pay, you may be able to apply for Universal Credit or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

5.3. What about if I'm self-employed?

You can apply for Universal Credit." (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 10.03.2020)