

Webcam counselling service

Toolkit: Practitioner Guidelines & FAQs



Webcam practitioner guidelines

These guidelines have been compiled to support best practice for delivering counselling and mediation using video conferencing/webcam. They form part of a suite of documents called **Webcam Toolkit**.

In line with the Service Specification for Webcam counselling/mediation, practitioners will need:

- **To study these guidelines carefully including the FAQ's**
- **Have had one to one input for the software platform being used (e.g. Zoom*) and practice using the software processes**
- **Completed at least 2 practice sessions in role-play, one of which must be with their supervisor**
- **Met the competencies for delivery in order for supervisor to “sign off” as competent to deliver by this medium**

Note: It is assumed that all practitioners using webcam already have the qualifications and competence to deliver counselling and/or mediation

*Zoom instructions for practitioners are available in *Webcam Toolkit: Guidelines for Centres*

Webcam counselling service

Toolkit: Practitioner Guidelines & FAQs

Physical Space



It's a good place to start by remembering that although the physical client "space" is different, it is important to remember that you still have a client or clients in the room with you.

Your focus may be on the PC/laptop screen initially, and the technology, however it needs to shift quite quickly to the client, their dilemma and the therapeutic relationship. Your facial expression will need to make up for other kinds of body language so think about how you communicate your emotions with just your face! You might want to do this by taking a video of yourself on your phone and playing it back.

Try to make sure that the lighting has been carefully considered before you connect to the client – lights behind you tend to darken your face, lights that are too bright tend to give you a ghostly aura.

See yourself

Make sure you have managed the minimum number of role-plays well, especially starting and ending the session. It is also important to make sure that you run the practice sessions from both ends of the session i.e. from the counsellor view and then the client view.

Have a good think about the background you are sitting in. What does it tell the client about you? Are there people passing by? Is someone likely to open a door in the room?

Webcam counselling service

Toolkit: Practitioner Guidelines & FAQs

Distracting pictures on the wall? Too much ceiling? Are you too close? Too far away? What do you want the client to see other than you? To position yourself well we recommend that your head and shoulders are visible in the screen.

Depending on what system you use i.e. Zoom, Skype or other – It is recommended that the client is the larger image where possible and the self (counsellor) is the smaller inset image.

Keeping an inset view of yourself on the screen is recommended – it allows you to continually see what the client will see.

Using a headset

The software brands tell us that millions of online gamers and Skype users already know, for best results with VoIP (voice over internet provider) use a headset. It is **not**, however, the most natural view of you or your clients. If the audio connection is not good enough and you **have** to use headsets, try to make sure this is as unobtrusive as possible – the client may see you as a call handler, or airline pilot if you go for the full double headgear!

Webcam microphones are far from the audio source (you), and built-in laptop microphones are right next to the speakers. These can create feedback loops that are difficult to overcome. For the best audio quality, use a headset with a boom microphone. When you practice (role-plays) work out what is best for you and the “client”. Remember, no headset is preferable.

Reduce gaze angle

This phrase refers to the angle between your camera centre-field and your own line-of-sight. The difference is called the gaze angle. You can reduce the gaze angle by putting the camera right next to your display monitor; preferably near the area you watch the most often. This is automatic if you are using a laptop. As you watch, you’ll be looking towards the camera at the same time. Your video will look natural to your participants, and feel more natural to you too. For an added touch, **you can look directly into the camera from time to time**, for example when challenging, although focussing on the

bottom right hand corner can be more comfortable for recipient. As stated, It is more common that both you and the other person(s) will be using a laptop. So things to bear in mind are that the images may be smaller, the audio will be built in, and where there are two people engaged in counselling at the other end, they may be forced into a form of

Webcam counselling service

Toolkit: Practitioner Guidelines & FAQs

intimacy that might be challenging for them.

Good lighting helps

When backlit, you may appear hard to see on camera. When illuminated from only one side, it can lend a mysterious look to your online personality. The brightness setting on the camera can help minimize this, but it's a good idea to experiment with lighting, possibly adding a desktop lamp to overcome any back or side lighting.

What do you wear?

The broadcast TV professionals have it right: solid colours in light shades, such as light blue and pale yellow work best. Try to avoid stripes and busy patterns.

Move and gesture slowly

Depending on your video quality settings and available bandwidth, it might be helpful to use smooth, slow gestures. Otherwise, your gestures may appear "jumpy". In your role-play sessions, try waving your hand about and see what a distraction it is.

Start on time

When you are late starting a face to face session, your clients may not mind waiting if they know you are running a bit behind. When meeting online, your clients don't have that advantage. Starting on time is much more important online.

- It is recommended that you open the web cam space as host about 5 minutes before the session (you may want to book the session for 10 minutes before the first one so that both you and the clients have a chance to adjust any audio or visual settings before you begin the counselling)
- Leave a ten minute gap afterwards in case of any setting up teething problems taking the session over the allocated time (This is mainly for first appointments)
- It is also good practice to set up the web-session and make sure that the email link to the client has been sent well in advance of the appointment. Preferably within 24 hours of booking the appointment. Good practice might be to send a reminder about 10 minutes before the booked time

Engage with the medium

- Make sure that both you and your clients are seeing and hearing each other well before you begin the counselling process. May sound obvious but sometimes small adjustments can make a big difference to audio and visuals

Webcam counselling service

Toolkit: Practitioner Guidelines & FAQs

- Zoom has a menu just below the screen and needs a wiggle with your mouse to appear. If the video or audio (bottom left) have a red line through them, they need a click to remove
- Once all the checking out is done, try to forget the technology and engage with the client content and the counselling process. This is the bit you know how to do!

Technical Problems

- Ensure you have all client information – telephone numbers etc. in the event that the equipment isn't working effectively
- If you encounter any problems with sound or visuals with your client – do not panic!
- Use of the 'chat' facility is one way of communicating to your client what is happening and what you are going to do; e.g. checking phone number with clients if no sound
- if the client cannot hear you and you cannot hear the client, use the chat facility to let them know that the Centre will contact them
- If the Centre has a fall back telephone arrangement for outgoing calls and the counsellor is working from home, then that arrangement can be activated. **Do not be tempted to use your own personal mobile or landline to call clients**
- Equally, if the quality of both video and audio is impaired you may want to turn off the video and continue with **audio only**

Note: If you find that this medium for delivery is practice that you wish to develop further, use webcam as often as you can. That may mean with friends and family or work colleagues and particularly for supervision. This will enhance both your confidence and competence over time.

Practitioner competencies

Required competencies for delivering counselling/mediation via webcam/video.

Practitioner competencies	
Have accessed guidelines and understood issues raised	Can accurately respond to any questions raised by supervisor
Completed 2 role-plays using webcam/video and received feedback	Feedback
Completed one session with supervisor	Feedback discussion

Webcam counselling service

Toolkit: Practitioner Guidelines & FAQs

Can start a session with a technical check with the clients	Verbal explanation
Can finish a session offering a “what happens next” explanation to the clients	Verbal explanation
Is familiar with processes for technical breakdown	Verbal explanation
Is clear about where the delivery is taking place and the privacy issues surrounding this	Statement
DA and CP understanding for this channel of delivery?	Supervisor to check

Frequently asked questions

What will the client journey have been in order to get this appointment with me?

- They will have seen the option for webcam counselling on web-site or via social media or other
- Phoned your local Centre or Response (0300) booked and paid for session
- Received an email with Zoom or software invite

What will they have received via email?

- Zoom (or other software) link with date and time of appointment
- Tips on how to get the most out of the session
- A sample email is available in Toolkit: Guidelines for Centres document on Relate Extra

What do I do if the client doesn't appear at the time of the appointment?

- Allow 5 minutes and go to the designated inbox and re-send the email sent to them after the booking
- Allow a further 5 minutes and make one attempt at ringing them
- After that, treat as a DNA

Where will I find the client's telephone number if I have to ring them?

- Penelope

Webcam counselling service

Toolkit: Practitioner Guidelines & FAQs

What are the first things I should be saying?

- ‘Hello’ followed by whatever you usually say when you greet clients f2f or on the telephone.
- Checking out the technology is essential “can you hear me OK?”, “can you see me?”
- Their names and what they like to be called?
- How this session will run – timing, aims, content, I will be writing etc.
- Confidentiality any other protocols for counselling

Is the first session on webcam a client intake meeting (CIM)?

Yes, all first sessions of web cam counselling, need to take the form of an initial assessment (CWAC) and follow the protocols set up for face to face counselling (see service specification. Clients need to be aware that there may be individual sessions as part of the assessment process.

The form filling that you would do f2f will probably be out of sight on the screen. Tell the clients that you are form filling and may look away to do that, before you start writing, or have a copy of the form on your desktop and show the document as a “screen share”.

Remember this is a counselling session **as well as** a process of assessment for Relate counselling.

What do I tell the clients about on-going sessions?

- Is this slot suitable and available on-going? check before the session so that on-going appointments can be seamless
- When the same counsellor is allocated client(s) there will usually be 3 or more sessions booked out for on-going and they will also be allocated the payment online process.
- If the Centre is operating a “online payment” system, then the agreed next session can be booked and client will automatically get a payment email
- Wherever possible the counsellor delivering the initial consultation will continue to work with the client(s)
- A regular slot at a different time? (find out what your availability for on-going is **before** the session)
- If after the first session, no further slots have been booked out the counsellor can reserve another 3 or more slots for them and after each session they will have to ring in the following day and pay
- Send email to appointment secretary/administrator to let them know what you have arranged for clients (if you are a counsellor who updates Penelope for on-going appointments continue to do this)
- Do not leave the client in a ‘not knowing’ place, if you can help it i.e. Try **not to say** “I

Webcam counselling service

Toolkit: Practitioner Guidelines & FAQs

will leave it to you to ring in and book another appointment”

How do I manage the session if there is a DA or CP disclosure?

- Relate DA and CP policies apply for both
- Where DA is disclosed, the protocols set out in in the service specification, which closely align with face to face protocols, need to be followed. An “in person” referral *may* need to be made. Rationale lies in the fact that we cannot be sure who else is in the house. This could mean that individual sessions are sabotaged or inhibited by the coercive or abusive person.
- Note: further guidelines are being developed to help with assessment and processes. this section will be updated and the information above is a placeholder for new directive information. In the meantime please **consult** when DA is disclosed for webcam clients. More diligence is required to assess safety and appropriateness when there is a disclosure and whether webcam is the most suitable channel to continue the counselling in for both parties

Is there a checklist for ending the session?

There isn't but you might want to create your own.

What happens in order to present a survey to the clients?

Any surveys or TDWM documentation will need to be conducted by email outside of the limitations of the webcam session, unless processes have been developed in your Centre.

When will the TDWM be part of this service?

All Relate measuring outcome processes are part of this service.

What are we doing about the DPP agreement?

This needs to be sent in advance as an attachment with the software invite email and returned to the Centre by the client.

Do I read the confidentiality statement out to the clients?

Yes - this is also recommended to be sent with the initial email and DPP agreement. However is good practice to remind clients at the beginning of the first session as well just as you would for a telephone appointment.

What if one partner is in another location? Do I wait until both are connected and visible?

Webcam counselling service

Toolkit: Practitioner Guidelines & FAQs

Yes, any small talk with one partner is not best practice. You can go out of camera, while you are waiting for both to appear online and then join them when you can hear or see they are both in attendance.

Ending sessions – do I end the session or let them leave first?

This may be something that you want to take control of. It is always good practice to say something like “OK, I am going to close the system now, bye”. Be sure that the system has closed down and the software window is closed completely, before you say or do anything. If the window is still open the slightest “sigh” can be heard!