

Cyberwork

Are you resuming face-to-face sessions?

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‘It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change’

I find the words of Charles Darwin are helpful as we adapt both to the myriad of changes and fluctuating restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. While some workers remained in their place of work throughout the pandemic, others (myself included) spent this time working exclusively from home, with the wide range of challenges and experiences (both positive and difficult) that this has brought to our daily lives. With the easing of restrictions, there is a greater move towards, and demand for, resuming activities in person, including when it comes to counselling face to face. This brings relief to some and the chance of a return to normality – while others experience increased anxiety at how to manage this process safely.

Navigating new ways

As therapists make plans to return to our offices, meet in person and learn new ways of safely working within the restrictions of our country and the virus, we are also supporting our clients on this same journey. Therapists have been acutely aware of the mirroring and close identification which we are naturally having with our clients in relation to the pandemic. While it may have enhanced our empathy and understanding, it's also taken more energy to bracket off our experiences and responses in the moment, in order to stay focused on the worldview of our clients – meaning the support of supervisors, colleagues, managers and

our employers has never been more important than in the last 18 months.

Whenever there's change, we know that having our voices heard, valued and taken into account, being given time and support to adjust to the change, are of paramount importance. I'm aware of a number of workplaces embracing a blended, or hybrid, approach, which provides the opportunity for individualised support for their workers. For example, if your health or someone you live with is vulnerable, this can mean that you want to continue minimising your contacts with others, and employers are open to this.

As we return, our workplaces may look and feel very different. There will be new processes and policies in place to maintain stricter hygiene, such as being required to take regular lateral flow tests, as is now common for many professions and for partaking in activities. Some counselling organisations require any client entering their premises to take a lateral flow test and show the results. While this may add another layer of safety, there may be some clients who do not wish to do this, or prefer to remain seeing you online, hence the importance, and value, of offering a blended approach.

Different rules and guidance

Therapists need to factor in how long these processes will take, hold in mind the size of the waiting area, how clients can maintain social distancing, the route to the counselling room, the safety of staff in the admin office, all while making appointments for client sessions. These considerations will vary, depending upon the current restrictions in place and where we live and work. For example, a therapist may live in Bristol, England, but work in Cardiff, Wales – meaning that two

different sets of rules and guidance will apply – in Wales, at the time of writing, face coverings are still required in most indoor settings, whereas they are only required in England in crowded indoor places.¹

Not all offices and rooms will have windows that can be opened, and some are hermetically sealed because of air conditioning, so how these issues are managed by your employer will influence your levels of comfort and confidence as you, or your clients, return to the physical workplace. An orientation session, to acquaint workers with new processes and policies, and to answer any questions, is a good place to start. Equally, clients visiting the premises for counselling may have similar questions and will need to have clear information to instil confidence that the counselling sessions will be conducted safely.²

The following may help when considering a return to the physical workplace:

- Ask yourself what additional support you might want at this time of further change.
- Express concerns and ask questions about your workplace.
- Keep apprised of the current restrictions and guidance.
- Familiarise yourself with hygiene procedures prior to seeing clients face to face. Be ready to answer their questions.
- Ensure you have adequate time between clients to incorporate these new processes. ●

REFERENCES

- 1 <https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/coronavirus/working-within-the-restrictions/>
- 2 <https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/coronavirus/deciding-how-to-work-with-clients/>

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