

COVID-19 Guidance:

The Ethics and Practicalities of a Safe Return to Face to Face Practice

Introduction

The lockdown period has involved a steep learning curve for those who have not previously worked online and for some this has proved to be an interesting and alternative way of working. Others, who may not feel as comfortable working remotely, will want to know how they can restart their practices ensuring the safety and wellbeing for all concerned.

As we evolve through the various changes made to return the UK back to becoming more inclusive, the NCH has prepared this guide "The Ethics and Practicalities of a Safe Return to Face to Face Practice" to help our members confidently make their own plans and decisions.

It incorporates previous guidance from our updates and includes increased ethical as well as practical considerations.

For some clients hypnotherapy is an essential human contact. It is your decision to return to in person, face to face practice and one which has to take into account the needs of each individual client. You may conclude telephone or online therapy is the best way for all concerned.

Protecting yourself and your clients will be of paramount importance and your major considerations will be around:

Ethics and what should now be included in your terms and conditions:

- [The practical steps to the new ways of face to face working](#)
- [The importance of supervision during this time](#)
- [Your insurance provider: their requirements and limitations](#)

The following guide is intended to provide you with suggestions and points for reflection to enable you to decide whether this is the right time for you to return to face to face working.

Read each section carefully and if there are any comments or observations regarding the guide, please email: standards@hypnotherapists.org.uk

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1. Coming together but keeping apart

1.1. Organisation

Your first step must be to check with your most recent regional Government update and then your professional indemnity insurance provider and comply with both their requirements. Continue to do so as these may change in relation to the spread of the virus.

Terms of your policy may vary and it is up to you to ensure you are fully conversant to your level of cover. There are insurance companies who will not cover claims made for contracting COVID-19 which means if your client contracted the virus and believes you passed it to them, any claim arising may not be covered by your insurance.

You need to be aware of the risks.

1.2 Risk assessment

Before reopening consider action needed to ensure the premises are thoroughly clean, safe and free from infection due to being left empty.

The UK Government has prepared guidance on how to work safely during the coronavirus outbreak – Working safely during the coronavirus outbreak; a short guide:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

Before face to face, in person practice can recommence it will be important to carry out a risk assessment of both the premises and your therapy room.

Help to complete a risk assessment is available from the Health and Safety Executive website:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/risk-assessment-template-and-examples.htm>

A useful start is to compile a breakdown of the way you work from the beginning to the end of your working day.

Consider each action and the risk of contracting or passing on COVID-19, examples may be:

- Assessing the the entrance and access to your premises and therapy room

- Is there a waiting room and a reception?
- How will you comply with the guidance of the minimum 1 plus metres distancing?
- Are there other therapists in your premises?
- How will you arrange appointments so as to avoid unnecessary contact?
- Will you send a communication to your client setting out the way the appointment will run? Perhaps it may include instruction on when not to attend an appointment; giving the client clear information on accessing the building, the importance of timekeeping and consequences of failing to do so; the facilities available such as; toilets, drinks, stationery, whether they need to wear a mask?
- It is advisable to remove any items like magazines, leaflets or anything which can be picked up or touched attracts risk of spreading the disease.

In conducting your risk assessment consider who may be at higher risk. Take into account the characteristics of each individual and pay particular attention to any vulnerabilities which may put them at higher risk.

Consider which situations may cause transmission of the virus and likelihood of it happening, and take steps to make changes to remove or manage the risk.

1.3 Social distancing

The UK Government and the devolved nations make changes according to the risk of spread of infection. These will be updated regularly to reflect the degree of risk. Whether the social distancing guidelines express safe distancing to be 2 metres or 1 plus metres, it is your responsibility to ensure you are **fully aware** of the current guidance and reflect this into your working practice.

Consider how social distancing can be maintained between yourself, clients and other users of the premises, paying particular attention in communal areas. Do you need to mark areas designating the appropriate distance points? Do you need to stagger appointments with other practitioners and their clients?

2. Practicalities

The following includes a number of points and steps which form the bare necessities of the future of face to face hypnotherapy. There are a number of government websites which can be accessed for more detail and we recommend you do.

2.1 Before you start

- If you rent a space check with your landlord regarding any restrictions or specific requirements
- Conduct a deep clean of the premises and all equipment where they have been left unused during lockdown; there can be a risk of Legionnaires Disease <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/legionella-risks-during-coronavirus-outbreak.htm>
- Inform clients in advance of the new procedures eg. Arrive on time: not early or late, to bring their own drink and stationery; that you will only accept contactless payment facilities (then ensure card machines are sanitised after clients).
- Consider sending clients a checklist form for completion prior to meeting with them, asking them to verify any illnesses/conditions to allow you to assess their level of risk
- Consider displaying signage to remind people to keep their distance and to maintain good hand washing. Also install screens where appropriate such as at reception desks
- Pay careful attention to your schedule and timings of your appointments as well as other therapists in the same premises and coordinate arrivals and exits to minimise meetings
- Give yourself at least 30 minutes between clients to minimise clients passing each other and to provide sufficient time for disinfecting and cleaning between sessions
- Consider buying couch roll to cover your furnishings
- You may wish to use a no-touch thermometer to check each clients temperature before they arrive
- Ensure there is good ventilation, maintain fresh air flow by opening windows and not using air conditioning
- How do you plan to clean and disinfect your premises and therapy room between clients?

- Consider your blankets and pillows/pillowcases, chairs and couches and ensure you have sufficient to change between clients and then wash used soft materials at 60 degrees
- Where tissues or paper hand towels are supplied ensure you provide a covered bin into which they can be safely disposed and use disposable gloves to handle any such used items and waste
- Hand washing or hand sanitising facilities are key so plan for provision of these
- Maintain correct practice for hand washing ensuring the 20 second timing
Note: any hand gels or sanitising wipes must have an alcohol content of 70 per cent.
- Inform clients in advance that you will only accept contactless payment facilities and ensure card machines are sanitised after clients.
- Ask clients to complete checklist to inform you of any factors which could place them in a category of higher risk.

2.2 Coping between clients:

- Wash hands for 20 seconds using hot water and soap
- Dispose safely in a bin with a lid any couch roll, disinfectant wipes and any other items used by or for the client using disposable gloves
- Wash your hands thoroughly for a minimum of 20 seconds afterwards
- Disinfect any surface touched by a client such as couch, chairs, door handles, toilet facilities
- Open doors and windows to ventilate the treatment and waiting areas.
- Replace couch roll on chairs and treatment couches in readiness for the next client.
- Keep doors to areas not used by client closed
- Change masks and/or other PPE if being worn
- At the end of the working day place all waste in sealable plastic bags and follow local waste disposal advice.
- If worn place uniform in sealable plastic bag for laundering before leaving, dispose of the bag afterwards
- Wash all uniforms, towels, coverings on a 60°C washing machine cycle
- Open doors and windows to ventilate the areas used by clients.

2.3 Home working

For members who see clients in their clients' homes, they will need to undertake the same type of risk assessment to assess the potential for transmission of the virus between you and your client. Check with your specific Government department first to see if client home visiting is permissible, then check with your insurance company permissions and if there will need to be any exclusions regarding risks of COVID-19 transmission.

3. Screening

It will be your responsibility to identify clients at increased risk of infection (high, moderate or low) and screen your clients as mentioned before seeing them face to face. There is an NHS checklist which provides details of those conditions considered to place individuals in the various risk categories: If they are at high risk they will have been contacted by the NHS and are shielding. Clients in this category have been identified as being at extremely high clinical risk of infection and must avoid face to face contact with anyone outside their household for at least 12 weeks following any period of lockdown.

Do not treat clients in this high risk group.

3.1 Screening for COVID-19 symptoms and when not to see a client

Check the NHS website for any updated symptoms to look for and check daily if you are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms. This could include taking **your** temperature each day. If you become aware of any COVID-19 symptoms you should immediately cancel any booked appointments and follow government guidance about self-isolation.

Check members of your household and if anyone is displaying or experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms, you must cancel all appointments and put yourself in quarantine for 14 days, as per government advice.

Check with clients 24 hours in advance of any appointment if they or anyone in their household is experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms. If a client or anyone in their household is experiencing symptoms they must not attend the session, They must follow government guidance and self-isolate for a minimum of 7 days if it is them, or 14 days if it is a member of their household.

If you or a member of your household experience COVID-19 symptoms call 111 and take advice and follow the NHS guidance on their website.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>

3.2 When not to see your client

Circumstances when you should not see clients face to face:

- You or any member of your household have any COVID-19 symptoms
- A client has COVID-19 symptoms
- A client is self-isolating or in quarantine
- A member of a client's household or anyone the client has been in contact within the last 14 days has COVID-19 symptoms
- A client is in the high risk group and is shielding
- Think carefully, do your research and consult your insurance provider before commencing in person face to face sessions for any clients in the moderate risk group <https://digital.nhs.uk/coronavirus/shielded-patient-list>
- Call 111 for advice if necessary and encourage your clients to do the same.

4. Legal considerations

4.1 Duty of care, negligence and risk

You will be familiar with the Code of Ethical Conduct and Performance <https://www.hypnotherapists.org.uk/about-nch/code-of-ethics/> and your training will have explained your duty of care to your clients. This duty will extend to ensuring you treat your clients' safety and welfare as a high priority and do nothing to cause harm. The above guidance is intended to give you an understanding of some of the key steps which are to be taken as an individual hypnotherapist to safeguard those who use your services. It is not an all inclusive, one size fits all and it will be very much your responsibility to identify areas of risk and take the appropriate action.

Failure to safeguard because of action or omission could result in a legal claim being made against you for negligence. The limitation period for a third party to bring a negligence claim is three years from the event occurring or from when they ought reasonably to have become aware. Your therapeutic relationship is also a contractual one, and a breach of contract claim has a six year limitation period.

4.2 Can I use a disclaimer?

You may at this point consider asking your client to sign a disclaimer. Be aware disclaimers or exemption clauses are terms which seek to exclude or limit liability. They are common and take many different forms. However, if they hinder the public in seeking redress where a practice has not complied with their obligations they may be considered unfair. Many disclaimers can be misleading such as "At your own risk", The Office of Fair Trading states:

"Contract terms, including 'at your own risk' disclaimers, cannot be used to exclude or restrict an organisations liability for death or personal injury caused by its negligence."

This means that liability cannot be waived just because you ask clients to sign a disclaimer stating they know there is a risk.

You are advised to check carefully with your insurance provider to understand the extent of your cover.

4.3 Confidentiality – when can it be breached?

If you receive a positive test result for coronavirus, the NHS is undertaking contact tracing. This involves you being interviewed about people you've been in contact with. The NHS will then contact them to provide support and testing. This brings additional implications regarding your **duty of confidentiality**.

Your existing contract may refer to the limits of confidentiality relating to the balance of public interest. Public interest concerns the general welfare and rights of the public which ought to be recognised, protected and advanced. There are specified circumstances where it is in the public interest to disclose information where it would prevent a serious and imminent threat to public health, national security, the life of the individual or a third party, or to prevent or detect serious crime.

4.4 Last but definitely not least

It may well be appropriate to include a clause to reflect the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic requiring you if contacted to inform the NHS of people you have been in contact with. In this case, you may need to share their name and contact details but not the context in which you know them. Nevertheless, they may be contacted by the NHS. An additional clause expressing that you will do this if required will avoid any misunderstandings should there be a need.

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