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COSCA Guideline on the Use of Technologies in: Counselling/Psychotherapy, Supervision and the Use of Counselling Skills

This guideline provides guidance to those involved in the provision of counselling and psychotherapy, supervision and the use of counselling skills, using a range of different technologies. These include skype, instant messaging, texting, phone, email, chat rooms and fora, and other kinds of electronic means of communication.

COSCA recognises the importance of the use of technology for providing counselling and psychotherapy, supervision and in the use of counselling skills, and the significant benefits that the use of technologies can bring to clients, especially those who have difficulty in accessing face-to-face services or who have a preference for them.

As COSCA is firmly committed to public protection, this guideline may be used within COSCA's Complaints Procedure to consider issues arising from the practice of the use of technologies by COSCA members.

In the use of technologies, there is a different dynamic due to the counsellor, supervisor and the person using counselling skills not necessarily having direct control over the physical environment in which the use of technologies takes place. Counsellors and psychotherapists, supervisors and the users of counselling skills should nevertheless continue to ensure confidentiality of their own physical environment during the use of technologies.

In addition, counsellors and psychotherapists, supervisors and the users of counselling skills:

- have the responsibility to take reasonable steps to ensure that their clients are in a safe physical environment, but they cannot be held responsible if their clients do not observe the terms of the contract. This contract should contain an informed consent procedure that informs the client about the safe use of technologies.
- should be adequately skilled to meet the ethical and legal standards and requirements of the use of technologies.
- should be acutely aware of the possibility of dual relationships and breaches of confidentiality being created with current and former clients through the personal use of public domain websites.
- should take account of international legislation regarding the delivery of the use of technologies in non UK countries

For more detailed knowledge of the ethical use and practice of technologies in counselling and psychotherapy, supervision and the use of counselling skills, please see below a link to the Online Therapy Institute's Ethical Framework for the Use of Technology in Mental Health. <http://www.onlinetherapyinstitute.com/ethical-training/>

Brian Magee, COSCA Chief Executive
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