



Supervision: COVID-19 Considerations

This is a challenging period in which we live. In times of stress, a supervisor's first priority is self-care. We're remembering one of George Sweet's sayings, "The most important person in the therapy room is the counsellor." At first sight this may seem counter intuitive to the usual narrative about our commitment to service and putting the client's needs first. We think what George meant is that a prerequisite for effective counselling is that the counsellor is in a resourceful state. There is a parallel process for supervisors who are sometimes supporting counsellors who are stressed and in a state of not knowing. Therefore it is really important that supervisors remain in a resourceful state themselves through excellent self-care, and are able to check and offer suggestions to supervisees with respect to self-care. The five pillars that form the foundation of health and wellbeing need to be in place - eating well, sleeping well, exercising well, pleasuring well, and continue the work of self-awareness, and personal and spiritual development. During the Christchurch earthquakes, three qualities were evident in those who showed most resilience: an ability to be in the moment, an ability to make useful meanings for events, and a robust personal (spiritual) philosophy. When supervisors can connect with a place of inner peace, they are in the best position to support supervisees.

The theme of "supervisor first" can also be applied supervision practice. The most powerful way to influence counsellors toward best practice is by modelling best practice as a supervisor. Supervisors need to be aligned with values, principles and guidelines of our Code of Ethics. Guidelines in **Section 13** in particular address on-line counselling and all the directives in **13.2** also apply to supervision. Many have found sections 3.14 and 3.15 in *Ethics in Practice: A Guide for Counsellors*, edited by Kathie Crocket, Margaret Agee and Sue Cornforth, still relevant. Complying with all the restrictions during the COVID-19 lock down is calling many of us to up-skill in the use of modern technology. Enforced isolation means continuing to communicate with counsellors at a time when supervision is of particular importance for their personal and professional support. We can model best practice for counsellors in many ways.

Keeping up to date with bulletins on the government's official COVID-19 web site, and the NZAC COVID-19 updates, will allow us to give useful information to counsellors and remind them to also check those websites.

<https://www.nzac.org.nz/assets/Uploads/NZAC-COVID-19-Guidelines-23.04.20.pdf>

Developing a consent form for online supervision that supplements the supervision contract that is already in place. Such a consent form is in fact an additional set of agreements and understandings that are designed to safely meet the needs of supervisors, counsellors and their clients.

Such contractual agreements will include:

- Risks to confidentiality and the limits of on-line security.
- Possible technology issues and a plan to follow if a session is interrupted.
- Which on-line services (platforms) can be used.
- How confidentiality and privacy is to be preserved.
- How fees or koha are to be handled.
- A safety plan for in times of emergency, including contact details for agencies and/or people who are equipped to help.
- A requirement to have a secure and confidential place from which to conduct on-line sessions.
- An agreement to have no recording of sessions unless first discussed and the use of any such recordings specifically defined and confined.
- An agreement to strictly adhere to time limits for sessions.

Supervisors who are working with students completing counselling qualifications will need to liaise closely with training providers so that they are well informed about course adaptations and requirements during this time of lock down, and whether or not students who would be normally on placements are permitted to be providing on-line counselling. Likewise, counsellors who are working for agencies can be encouraged to work strictly within their agencies protocols for on-line counselling during the COVID-19 Level 4 period.

In terms of professional development, supervisors can be pointing counsellors in the direction of useful articles, links and other literature on aspects of providing on-line therapy. The NZAC web site will also contain helpful offerings.

Supervisors need to be aware and show sensitivity to Māori with whom they are working by explaining and encouraging the use of on-line communication to those who culturally have a strong preference for a kanohi ki te kanohi mode of communicating.

**Mā te Manaakitanga tātau e kōkiri whakamura.
We will get through this together.**

I roto i te kotahitanga,

NZAC Supervision Committee

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