

Remote/Digital Counselling – Information, Boundaries and Guidelines

Remote/Digital Counselling describes counselling sessions that are not face to face and in the same room – they may be provided by telephone, online video/webcam, or e-counselling (email). There are a few extra things to know when accessing remote counselling so please read the following information to ensure you are ready to take part.

Suitability for Remote/Digital Counselling - There are some circumstances that mean that remote counselling may not be appropriate for you – during your assessment we will assess your suitability and if we think this is the case we will discuss other options with you. We ask you to let us know if, at any time, you are feeling actively suicidal, self-harming, or if you have severe or long-term mental health problems. In these circumstances we may need to explore with you if additional or alternative support is best for you.

Access – if you do not have a required device, or a private space, to access digital counselling, we can arrange for you to use a room on campus and computer equipment if needed. Health and Safety guidelines will be given separately. If you have any difficulties using any of the formats available, due to disability or other reasons, please let us know so that we can find a way to support you according to your needs.

Emergency Procedures – **You will need to give details of your emergency contact(s) and your GP surgery name, address, and phone number on the Counselling Contract before commencing any sessions.** At the beginning of each session you will tell your counsellor where you are (e.g. home address, university room no./block/campus. This is to ensure we can get help to you quickly in the case of an emergency.

Location – for privacy and confidentiality, please think about your surroundings. You need to be in a private, quiet space with no distractions or interruptions and preferably not overheard. It is not possible to provide counselling to you if you have others present, e.g. children, family, friends. (Unless in special circumstances when you need another person to help you to access the session).

Focus – It is important to be fully focused on the counselling session in progress so please do not perform other tasks during your appointment. This includes things like switching between other tabs and programmes, moving around excessively, physical tasks, listening to music, watching TV and gaming.

Webcam video sessions – if you are on video please wear appropriate clothing (not bed clothes) and ensure your background is appropriate with nothing too personal or potentially offensive showing. Turn off notification sounds on your device, if you can, to prevent sudden distracting sounds.

Technical Issues – If you are unable to log into a video session, please ring or text your counsellor to let them know and they can advise on how to proceed. If either party experiences technical difficulties during a video/online session, your counsellor will ring your phone and talk you through trying to re-establish connection. If re-connection is not possible, the rest of the session will switch to the agreed alternative platform e.g. telephone (if this is not possible, another appointment will be scheduled). Please ensure your device has enough battery charge to last for the whole session.

Counselling Agreement – we cannot begin sessions until you have returned by email the “Counselling Contract” document, to confirm that you have read, understood, and agreed to, the contents.

Expected Behaviour – the university’s normal Policies and Procedures apply during remote/digital/online interactions as well as on university premises. Please do not attend any sessions under the influence of alcohol or non-prescription drugs.

Sharing/Duplicating Content – You must not record any telephone or online sessions with your counsellor unless agreed with them beforehand. Please do not share any personalised material, including written exchanges between yourself and your counsellor, with others.

After the Session - allow yourself some time to reflect on what you have discussed and the feelings you are left with. Have some space to relax and ready yourself for what lies ahead during the rest of the day and week. Think about what you have learned during the session and any exercises/resources your counsellor has recommended. If you decided to make some changes, plan how you will put these into action – make some notes if it helps to remember. Use your support network (friends/family etc.) during the week. Focus on your self-care and wellbeing – you may want to treat yourself, take some exercise, eat healthily, and look at ways to improve your sleep routine.

Security – the university has taken all possible measures to keep your information safe and secure. Whichever device you use, (e.g. phone, computer, tablet), it is your personal responsibility to ensure that your information is kept private and secure at your end, especially if you are not the sole user of the device. We suggest you have the following in place: firewall/anti-virus/anti-malware, password protection for Wi-Fi, programmes, and devices. Ensure you log off immediately after your session and clear your internet history. Please ask if you need more information on ICT security.

Protect your password -

- Never share your login passwords with anyone else (for emails/websites etc.)
- Always password protect your Wi-Fi connection
- If you write passwords down – keep them somewhere safe
- If you suspect your password has been compromised change it immediately
- Use strong passwords made up from a combination of numbers, lower- and upper-case letters and ideally at least 8 characters long. For example:
O7ymp1c2893

Professional Boundaries - To protect the confidential nature and boundaries of the counselling relationship, counsellors will not accept any invitations to join social networks, even after the counselling has ended. If you and your counsellor meet accidentally, within college or elsewhere, your counsellor will not acknowledge you – this is not them being rude, it is only to protect your privacy.

Continuity of Care – if your counsellor has to stop working with you before the end of your Counselling, for instance due to illness, then you can choose to end the process (and return at a later time if required), or another counsellor from the team can access your information and work with you.

Talk to Us – If you have any questions, concerns, or feedback, please speak to your counsellor. We welcome your honesty and want to work together with you to make this experience as helpful and positive as it can be.