MALE SURVIVORS AOTEAROA
TE POARI O NGĀ MŌREHU TAITŌKAI O AOTEAROA

REMOTE SUPPORT GUIDANCE:
PEER SUPPORT & COUNSELLING SERVICES

- **Appreciate your Covid-19 role and focus**
- **Understand and manage the risks of remote support services**
- **Pay special attention to privacy and confidentiality**
- **Be prepared for a safe and enabling interaction**
- **Plan your remote support session**
- **Seek feedback**

1 CONTEXT

The impacts of the current Covid-19 pandemic and the associated socialisation restrictions may create a more stressful situation for many of our existing clients and will also present us with new clients. Our shared purpose is to "enable the wellbeing of male survivors of sexual violence" and it is important that we continue to provide effective advice e and support for our client community during this challenging time.

This practice note (PN|20.1) is issued with particular reference to the provision of peer support and counselling services to male survivors during the current Covid-19 pandemic. However, the practice note principles are intended to apply generally to the provision of remote-client support using mobile telephones and other video platforms. The guidance offered is intended to enable peer-workers and counsellors to maintain safe and productive contact with their survivor-clients and to continue to support them in a manner that assures their wellbeing and the integrity of the service relationship.

The intention of PN|20.1 is to raise awareness of the risks and issues associated with remote support and suggest some practical ways of managing these risks. However, providing effective remote support still relies on the peer worker or counsellor making their own assessment of the particular client circumstances and exercising sound judgment that assures the quality and focus of their interaction with their client.

2| COVID-19

It is especially important to be clear about your role and the focus of your work in the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The following questions may provide helpful prompts when preparing to engage in a remote support interaction with your client:

?   Are you in an appropriate frame of mind (and in a safe space) to engage with your client;

- Are you clear about the purpose of the interaction and what you hope to achieve?
- Perhaps it is simply to maintain contact – to check in to assure them you are still available to support them;
- It may not be a time for 'moving forward together' on their recovery journey but rather an opportunity to focus on stabilisation – helping them to address their current issues and maintain their emotional and physical wellbeing;
- Remember to be clear about what you can and cannot offer in terms of support during the current pandemic lock-down situation – what alternatives do you have in mind?

? Have you selected the most appropriate form of remote interaction after considering the cultural, intellectual, emotional, physical and functional needs of your client and their engagement history – voice, messaging, email or video (one-on-one or group)?

– It Is recommended that you discuss with the client 'how' the conversation can 'work best' and what technology they feel safe and/or confident to use - a 'how versus what' conversation.

? Are you as informed as you can be and/or prepared to enquire about your client's situation and how you can provide appropriate support? Consider the potential Covid-19 impacts:

– Anxiety levels are up and this may elevate the feelings of helplessness and loss of control felt by trauma clients;

– There may be additional domestic tensions in play, including family and relationship tensions, conflicts or violence;

– There may be heightened feelings of instability and insecurity due to employment issues and/or financial pressures;

– Consider how will you navigate these potential issues during your interactions – how will you respond and what can you reasonably offer by way of support.

? Are you prepared to deal with the technology issues that your client may be facing in participating in a remote support session; and how you will navigate a technology failure?

3 MANAGING REMOTE SUPPORT RISKS

Potential Risk	Management Approach
1. Confidentiality There may be security issues associated with the technology that you are using that could enable unauthorised access to and/or improper use of confidential client information. Constraints on client access to secure technologies may present particular engagement risks especially in the use of email and messaging (text) platforms to communicate confidential information	✓ **Devices:** Ensure that all of your devices (laptops, tablets and phones) are password protected and encourage your clients to do the same; ✓ **Video**: Where possible, use password secured Zoom technology for all on-line peer support (groups and one-on-one) and counselling sessions; ✓ **Voice only**: Signal is recognised as a secure voice technology but you are likely to be using clients service provider platforms. Where you have a choice, change to video-Zoom. ✓ **Messaging**: Signal is recognised as a secure messaging platform but many clients will be using more common apps – Messenger, WhatsApp, Facebook etc. Avoid using Facebook and try not to use text/messaging to communicate confidential information. ✓ **Email**: For many clients it will not be possible to establish secure email connections. Where possible assist clients to establish a non-personal email connection. Generally, try to minimise the communication of confidential information within the email text.
2. Privacy The challenge is to ensure the privacy of the client's physical environment during a peer support meeting or counselling session. This is necessary to assure the	✓ Check that your client's physical space is appropriate for the type of support interaction you are engaging in – on-line technology may let you view the client's physical location; as a minimum ask relevant questions to assure yourself that the environment is sufficiently private. ✓ Make sure that your client is confident that your physical space is also secure

Potential Risk	Management Approach
integrity, quality and confidentiality off the support session.	✓ Agree with your client how you will know and what will happen if their physical privacy is compromised during the meeting. (Consider the use of a code word for your client to indicate they are no longer alone)
3. Safety In a remote support situation, it may be more difficult to recognise and respond to client safety concerns	✓ Make sure that you are aware of the local services and support that your client can access in the case of an emergency. ✓ Ensure that you are capable of establishing whether your client is in a crisis situation and make sure you are able to arrange an appropriate intervention. ✓ Consider what options you have to manage a crisis in the event of a technology failure

4. Informed consent
 	
Because remote support can present particular confidentiality and privacy issues, it is important that your client understands the risks and has agreed to participate in a remote support session
	✓ Develop an appropriate process for obtaining the informed consent of your client to participate in a remote support session. This can be achieved:
	  – Formally with a pre-signed form (text or email) that informs the client of the risks and obtains their approval; or
	  – Informally as part of the remote session by explaining the risks and gaining the client's approval to proceed – if you choose this option you should confirm the consent after the session with text or email (refer Appendix A).
	✓ You should always record evidence of your client's consent to the remote support engagement.

5. Absence of 'face-to-face' cues There is a risk of compromising the support relationship due to miscommunication and misunderstandings in the absence of 'face-to-face cues – body language, tone etc.	✓ Be prepared to concentrate more than in a face to face session to observe more closely and listen more carefully to compensate for the absence of normal body language and tone of voice cues etc. ✓ Be prepared to navigate miscommunications and misunderstandings and have recovery processes to restore and assure the support relationship. ✓ Be prepared for these remote sessions to be enervating and consider personal energy limitations when setting session timings.

6. Record keeping
 	
There is a risk that records of the remote support interaction will be incomplete due to the technological nature of the encounter – short texts and phone calls etc.
	✓ Develop effective processes for keeping appropriate records of remote support interactions including:
	  – Emails
	  – Messaging
	  – Phone conversations
	  – On-line video sessions
	✓ Refer to the MSA Confidentiality Policy

7. Boundaries The remoteness of the interaction can affect the nature (and professionalism)	✓ Agree an appropriate meeting environment (space) – both for yourself and your client – that is private and conducive to a productive session.

Potential Risk	Management Approach
of the encounter – more difficult to express empathy, inability to perceive client responses, inappropriate meeting environments etc.	✓ Be prepared to sustain a relaxed but more intensive focus on your client's responses than would generally be necessary in a face to face session. ✓ Make sure your own behaviour is, as far as practicable, consistent with your usual face to face interactions with your client.

4 PLANNING REMOTE CONVERSATIONS

The following checklist is intended as **a helpful prompt** for peer-workers and counsellors when considering their approach to providing remote support for a client. Where practicable the actual session plan (focus, timeframes, technology etc.) should be co-created with your client as a way of agreeing how you both intend to sustain your remote connection and interactions.

1. **Create a session plan:**
   a. Consider the focus and intention of the session(s);
      - Depending on the context agree how the session will operate
   b. Consider meeting frequency, timeframes and time constraints, scheduling etc.;
      - Be conscious of client constraints (e.g. care-giver and work responsibilities)
   c. Agree communication protocols – preferred communication systems, response times and emergency access.
      - Be aware that response delays can cause increased anxiety

2. **Consider the technology options and impacts**
   a. Agree with the client what technologies will be used to enable remote support – consider available and preferred options and security requirements
      - Messaging – avoid texting confidential information; consider standard text messages;
      - Voice only – ask you clients to store your first name only on their phone; try and limit the call to 20 minutes;
      - Video – preference password protected Zoom; endeavour to limit video interactions to 40 minutes for individuals and 75 minutes for groups; consider your location and the broadband speed and data requirements for this internet-based service;
      - Email – avoid emailing confidential information; where possible use encrypted or password protected documents/reports; for extra security, encourage clients to delete their correspondence with you.
   b. Consider how you can support your client's technology requirements
      - Remember that we can enable access to smartphones and top-up plans; if you are using Zoom, remember to check internet access to broadband and data;
      - It is best if you communicate from your desktop or laptop – this allows you to be more focussed and attentive during the session.
   c. Ensure that the client understands the risks (in particular confidentiality and privacy) inherent in the technology to be used:
      - Offer reassurance about how you will be managing privacy and confidentiality risks including record keeping.
      - **Gain client (informed) consent to participate in the on-line session (refer Appendix A)**

     d.   Agree how you will navigate a technology failure:

- Be aware that an unexpected connection failure can interrupt a session at an inappropriate time – have an agreed process for recovering your connection.

     e.   Obtain the clients informed consent to the remote support process:

- It is important that you reflect that agreement with your client and keep a record- file note or formal response.

3.   Consider remote session physical privacy

     a.   Agree with your client how you will ensure your interaction is private:

- Remember that your client also needs to be assured that your situation is private
- Agree how you will manage an unexpected privacy interruption; be aware that the client may have difficulty acknowledging the unexpected presence of another person (consider a code word signal)

4.   Consider remote session records

     a.   Consider how you will record the session – capturing emails and text messages, file- noting telephone calls and recording on-line video sessions.

5.   Think about capturing feedback

- It is important for us to understand if our interactions have been valuable for our clients;
- It is also important that we seek feedback in a manner that validates the client's participation, acknowledges their contribution and provokes some reflection on the conversation;
- And it is OK to offer our own positive reflection on the interaction in a manner that affirms and supports (enables) our client's wellbeing.
- Consider gathering post-session feedback (particularly for video session) using the MSA client service feedback form.

5 CONVERSATION TIPS

The following conversational questions or pointers have been suggested by your colleagues as examples of how you may choose to **frame and focus** your interaction.

Peer Mutuality:

For peer-workers, client conversations typically reflect the shared nature of a recovery journey – the peer worker and their client 'moving forward together'. It is important to acknowledge the intentional peer support principles of mutuality and shared world views in our dialogue with survivors. Think about this when framing your conversations and be sure to include comments and questions that reflect your engagement as a peer in your client's recovery-journey.

Presence:

We need to bring our client into the 'here and now' state for the meeting and give the meeting a focus, especially for anxious clients. This helps to give them a sense of agency and enhances their feeling of safety.

       "What is it that you are looking for in this conversation?"

       Or

       "It's good to make contact. What do you want us to talk about today?"

Care:

Our clients need to know that we always care about their wellbeing

"How are you keeping yourself safe?"

Or

"Thinking about how the pandemic (Covid-19) is affecting you, what you need to do right now, to be safe?"

Or (mutuality)

"Personally, I have been finding this pandemic situation very challenging. I have been (doing?) ...to keep myself safe. How about you...what are you doing to keep safe"

Focus:

Some clients are what we call 'story-tellers'...they can talk and talk and there is no 'off-switch'. It is always important to listen but it is also OK to interrupt them if the conversation is losing focus on the present 'current agenda'.

"I would like to hold you there, and talk about what's going on at the moment"

Or

"I don't need to hear all the details...what I am really interested in is where you are at right now"

Or (mutuality)

"I have been thinking about what you are saying...it reminds me of/about... (shared reflection) ...what do you think about that ...etc.

Validation:

We all like it and your clients will need it. When clients tell their stories...talk openly about their current situation and/or bring good ideas about their recovery journey, it is very important to acknowledge their contribution. And you can reinforce that validation with a follow up affirming-question.

"It's good that we had this conversation...it takes real courage to open up like this. What's it been like for you doing this?"

Or

"It's good that you can be this open... and talk about these things... how does it make you feel?"

Or (mutuality)

"It's been great sharing our experiences and ideas for moving forward...it's certainly been helpful for me...how about you?"

Reflection:

It is important to help our clients reflect on the purpose of the conversation and to recognise and retain the value of the interaction. It is also a positive way to bring the closing focus back to the 'here and now'.

"What did you get from this conversation?"

Or

"Thinking about our conversation, I'm curious what you 'see' that has helped today … what can you carry forward?"

Or (mutuality)

> **"This conversation has been really helpful for me … what are you taking away from this today that has helped you?"**

If our clients can't identify any benefits from the conversation, then its' OK to gently remind them that you care enough to have taken the time to listen.

> **"It's been good to talk with you today...I have enjoyed our conversation"**

> **"Keep safe"**

> Or (mutuality)

> **"This conversation has reminded me why I value my time with survivors ...our conversation has been really helpful for me … I hope it's also been helpful for you?**

> **"Let's keep in touch?"**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- ✓ On-line and Phone Support of Clients – Rob McGregor (MOSAIC, Wellington)
- ✓ Covid-19 Remote Therapy Guidelines – TOAH_NNEST
- ✓ Telepsychology Guidelines – Accident Compensation Commission
- ✓ Te Moko Psychology Services Informed Consent for Telehealth

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT CONFIRMATION

FORMAL: Letter/PDF requiring consent.

[Letterhead/Service Header/Form]

Kia ora [Client Name]

INFORMED CONSENT FOR ON-LINE SUPPORT SESSION

This form contains important information for providing you with on-line support using phone or internet services (for example Zoom or Skype).

Please read this document carefully. We can discuss any questions you have when we meet. By signing or giving your verbal agreement to this form you are confirming that you understand the issues set out below and agree to participate in and on-line support session(s). You can withdraw this consent at any time

The ability for us to 'meet on-line', rather than being face-to-face in the same location, has the benefit of enabling us to continue our support when we are both in a remote situation – as we must be currently due to the Covid-19 pandemic. How we wish to work together on-line is something we will discuss when we meet.

However, you should be aware of the following issues associated with participating in an on-line support session:

- *You will need to understand the online system we agree to use. Once we have agreed our preferred system (e.g. phone, WhatsApp, Skype or Zoom) then I will try to assist you to understand what's required for us to meet together online using that system.*
- *To ensure that confidentiality is maintained we must try to ensure that our sessions take place in private spaces. i.e., I am in my private office and you are in a private space where our session won't be overheard.*
- *During our session we may experience technical issues, or the system might stop working. If this happens I will follow-up with you by phone or text.*
- *In the event that you may become distressed during our on-line session we will make a plan at the beginning of our session for coping should that happen. For example, we will make sure you have an emergency contact person who can support you as required.*
- *I have a responsibility to keep our communications confidential and I will do my best to ensure this is achieved by using current encryption methods, password protected access and secure back-up systems. I will record notes of our session as usual.*

Please confirm your agreement to proceed with on-line support by signing this form and either returning a copy by email or enabling me record and confirm your verbal consent when we meet

Nga mihi

[Peer-worker / Counsellor]

Signed:_____Date:_____

INFORMAL: Email/Text confirming consent

Kia ora [Client Name]

Thank you for meeting with me today and for agreeing to participate in an on-line (peer support/counselling) session.

This (email/text) is to confirm that you understood my explanation of the issues associated with on-line communications, particularly the potential privacy and confidentiality issues, and that you gave your consent for the session to take place on the basis we agreed.

If you have any lingering concerns about on-line support sessions, please do not hesitate to contact me

Nga mihi

[Peer-worker/Counsellor Name]