

THERAPIST GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USING THE DHT PLATFORM

Dear Therapist

Welcome to the DHT family. We are so excited to have you part of the team to make a difference and shift the Mental Health needle for the better on a global scale. The aim is to make counselling and human connection accessible for anybody with an internet connected device.

The following document is for your careful attention, since you would need to complete a short questionnaire afterwards to ascertain competency on the platform.

Users on the DHT platform are referred to as clients and not patients, to accommodate different modalities, views and to keep the system uniform. NB – Take special note of the terms and conditions agreed upon signup. Because clients earn DHT Tokens as they utilise the platform to reward users for minding their mental health, no client linked to a therapist on the Dynamic Health platform may be removed from the platform into your private practice. This is for security for both client and therapist, and to ensure that we meet legal requirements of an online generated therapeutic platform.

Research shows that online counselling can be equally if not more effective than face-to-face counselling, but we realise that the shift to provide online counselling can be quite an adjustment. We therefore provide supervision and support for therapists who wish to learn more and add value within their online practice. The following is therefore a set of recommendations we have compiled to support you in your journey of online therapy and to build your online practice to be able to work from anywhere at any time.

As mentioned above, a short multiple-choice questionnaire will be posed at the end to serve as a competency measure, and to ensure quality assurance across the platform. We hope to provide a consistent, uniform, and reliable service to any client requesting support from a DHT therapist.



WHAT IS ONLINE THERAPY?

Online therapy is a relatively new treatment option and one, which is only now beginning to get attention in tertiary programs. In a nutshell; it is the provision of mental health treatment via the Internet on communication devices.

Online therapy is a convenient, electronically based, service which can be delivered anytime, anywhere. Driving to, finding parking, and being seen at an office is therefore eliminated. Studies have found that an increasing number of clients are willing to enter into Internet-based therapy and in fact, may be more compliant with that modality than with traditional face-to-face treatment. Furthermore, other studies have found that text-based therapy may result in even greater compliance and positive therapeutic outcomes (Hull, 2015).

In the field of Online Counselling, we acknowledge Digital Natives (people who were generally born after the 1980's and that are comfortable in the digital age, because they grew up using technology) and Digital Immigrants (People who were born before the 1980's and who had to make a conscious effort to learn to work with technology in adulthood).

Counselling services may be delivered using a variety of electronic mediums including video chatting, texting, emailing or voice messaging. And these services may be provided through a platform such as DHT. The DHT platform has its own video, audio, and text software, making it more secure, without any dependence on third party applications or regulations.

The cost per session is often lower, or the service rendered is more comprehensive, flexible, and accessible than what a traditional face-to-face hour can yield. The flexibility makes it possible for people to access therapy that are geographically isolated, or have limited mobility due to illness or domestic issues.



This new modality offers therapists a new revenue stream and to lower their overheads in office expenses and offerings when a client is seen face-to-face. Furthermore, since invoicing and payments are automated on the DHT system, it allows a therapist to spend more time on service delivery and less time on administration.

Some therapists have done online counselling for years, and others, like most of us, have been reluctant, and wanted to examine the how-to's and not-to's first. Whilst completing our training, the idea of conducting online counselling was not even an option to most of us. Even after real-time online communication such as Skype and Zoom became available, the idea of online therapy still evoked some procedural and ethical questions.

The HPCSA has subsequently put standards of practice in place, and distance-learning opportunities for online counselling have become increasingly more popular.

It should be noted, that Online Counselling is not suited for every therapist, just like it isn't suited for every client. If this is your niche, or you wish to supplement your existing private practice with more flexible work, then the rest of this document is for you.



WHO SHOULD OFFER ONLINE THERAPY?

It is expected that practitioners will be sensible and diligent in their consideration of the challenges of any new area of practice, including online therapy provision. Competence as a therapist in one medium, such as face-to-face work, does not necessarily translate into another medium, such as Online Therapy work.

Online therapists, like those working in face-to-face setting, are required to ensure that they are working within their appropriate scope of profession and are properly trained and supervised for all services they offer.

Online provision is a specialist area, requiring a level of competence at least as high as that for face-to-face work. Very few practitioners will be able to engage in online therapy without additional skills, training, and experience. NB - Online therapy is NOT appropriate for novice or inexperienced practitioners.

Things to consider when applying your skills and paradigm to Online therapeutic work:

- Not all paradigms are suitable for online work.
- Verbal communication skills now also need to be translated to text-based, written communication skills.
- The importance, and difficulties, of suddenly building and maintaining an adequate online therapeutic relationship
- The potential of greater clarification than in face-to-face work so that misunderstandings are avoided;
- Psychotherapeutic assessment of a client, and the physical and transactional limitations of online assessment;
- The therapist's knowledge of technical aspects relating to the security, privacy, and storing of data for online work.



SECURITY ON THE DHT SYSTEM

- Security on our platform is our number one priority, and our developers have designed the most secure platform they could possibly build to ensure that both therapist and client feels safe, contained, and supported.
- The number one security factor, is that video and audio sessions are NOT recorded on our servers.

The below information is just for reference:

- Dynamic Health Chat supports e2ee (end-to-end encryption), if you are using Dynamic Health Chat on a browser with support for insertable streams. Currently this means any browser based on Chromium 83 and above, including Microsoft Edge, Google Chrome, Brave and Opera.
- Dynamic Health Chat offers strong level encryption due to single server access, therefore users don't explicitly need to turn on e2ee.
- Dynamic Health Video Chat meetings in general, operate in 2 ways:
 - Peer-to-Peer (P2P) or via the Dynamic Health Chat Videobridge. This is transparent to the user. P2P mode is only used for 1-to-1 meetings. In this case, audio and video are encrypted using DTLS-SRTP all the way from the sender to the receiver, even if they traverse network components like TURN servers.
 - In the case of multiparty meetings, all audio and video traffic are still encrypted on the network (again, using DTLS-SRTP). This outer layer of DTLS-SRTP encryption is removed while packets are traversing the Videobridge; however, they are never stored to any persistent storage and only live in memory while being routed to other participants in the meeting.
- It is very important to note that when packets are also end-to-end encrypted, this second layer of encryption is never removed (nor can it be).
- Since Dynamic Health Chat is built on top of WebRTC, a deeper look into its security architecture was very important when evaluating security aspects.
- Overall basic 2048bit SSL encryption is used for all web protocol traffic.



PREREQUISITES

- Minimum of 3 years of direct clinical experience
- Current and valid professional registration with HPCSA/SACSSP/SANC to practice independently within your professional discipline.
- Individual BHF practice number registered within your discipline.
- Professional malpractice liability insurance policy ensuring Practitioner maintains coverage limits of at least R2 500 000 and in accordance with applicable national insurance requirements and Dynamic Health Today established limits.
- iOS or Android device purchased within the last 5 years to ensure compatibility on the DHT Platform.
- Video camera and/or software via iPhone, iPad, or Android devices to conduct video conferencing exclusively on the DHT platform
- Computer equipment and connectivity to access and enter encounter information into the DHT practitioner platform with a minimum 4mb internet link at your home or office.
- Agreement to participate in required orientation and competency training
- Availability to respond to your allocated Clients daily to meet their expectations, which is during morning and afternoon or during the afternoon and evening. Messages will be logged on the DHT platform, and a notification will be sent for client or therapist to respond within the 8-hour response time limit.
- An understanding of the non-circumvention clause, that no client may be removed from the platform for a minimum 2 years since the first session commenced.
- Important: If your schedule or modality doesn't allow you to meet client expectations under any one of the options above, participation in the DHT network would not likely be a good fit for you.



BUILDING SOLID RELATIONSHIPS ON THE PLATFORM

At Dynamic health we believe that growth and mental health happens within healthy relationships between clients and therapist. Notwithstanding the therapeutic modality, is the inherent ability of the therapist to develop a relationship with their clients. How does one develop healthy relationships in the Online realm? Through empathy, listening and to feel heard, reflection, mutual connection, and guidance (note; not advice, but guidance). These will also be the criteria on which reviews of each therapist will be based on the platform.

- **Cultural Issues**

- Online therapy offers therapists and clients the opportunity to contact each other from any part of the world. It must be stressed that competence to practise in one cultural environment does not necessarily imply competence to work in another. Practitioners should therefore be mindful of their practicing style, their knowledge of a culture or cultural nuances and be cautious to make any cultural assumptions. Be inquisitive, ask questions and address the potential cultural difference head on in a respectful and open manner.

- **Gender, race, and disability**

- Online therapy could reduce the influence of potential inequalities since a client's disability, gender or race may not be immediately apparent for example. Such barriers may therefore be minimised, yet therapists may need to reflect carefully on how such barriers may influence their paradigm, practice, and approach to some of life's challenges.
- In contrast, online therapy may be inaccessible to others who battle to read, or do not have access to fast internet or an appropriate device.

- **Age**

- Special attention should be given to online clients that are below the age of consent. The DHT platform allows for treatment of minors above the age of 13, which is the age of ascent in South Africa. It is very important to be mindful of the age of consent in each specific country from which a minor child accesses a psychotherapeutic intervention.



- Also be mindful of the difference of Digital Natives VS Digital Immigrants, which will be explained above.
- Clients are asked to confirm age and eligibility on the platform to cover each therapist and client on a legal basis, but please utilise professional judgement when working with minors, and clarify or notify admin should you be concerned of any malingering.

Informed consent, limitations to confidentiality and Identification

- Practitioners must reiterate the processes and limitations of consent on the onset of the therapeutic relationship as the therapist should not assume that clients would have read the terms and conditions in detail. A client has had to agree to all the relevant terms and conditions, limitations to confidentiality and the process of informed consent prior to even being matched to a therapist, but it should nevertheless be discussed by each individual therapist and counsellor.
- Lastly, confidentiality may be compromised with online therapy. It is advised that both client and therapist conduct sessions individually in a room/car/space, with a closed door, whilst wearing earphones.

INTERNET

- Remember to renew and maintain a good, fast, and secure internet connection to the office you will utilise for online therapy.
- Consider a generator, UPS, or Inverter to accommodate such a link during a power failure.
- Send your client a message on the platform at your soonest availability to inform them of any difficulties on your end to avoid them feeling rejected or abandoned.

PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY INSURANCE

- Remember to renew your professional indemnity insurance annually.
- Management of DHT have been in contact with several Professional Indemnity providers to recognise the platform. DHT meet all the necessary security and privacy protocols set out to be insured for professional indemnity purposes. Please be in contact should you need recommendations.



- Make sure that your insurer covers you for work with clients that live abroad.

ASSISTANCE

The DHT platform is designed to allow receptionists, practice managers or assistants to help therapists manage their schedules and diaries on the platform. It is therefore of great importance that every receptionist, practice manager or assistant signs an internal confidentiality agreement to protect the identity and activity of every client accessing the platform. Assistants will only be able to view the name of clients assigned to you, and will have admin rights to schedule sessions on your behalf. Assistants will not be able to communicate with clients; this activity is exclusively reserved for counsellors.

DIAGNOSTICS & REFERRAL

- When making a diagnosis, try to envisage the purpose of such a diagnosis. We have found that the least invasive diagnosis is generally better if the purpose is not for further psychiatric or legal purpose.
- The diagnostic code (ICD 10 code) will be present on every invoice requested by a client.
- Refer to the section in the Terms and Conditions Document, which states that the platform is not intended for the provision of clinical diagnosis requiring an in-person evaluation, and clients should not use it if they need any official documentation or approvals for purposes such as, but not limited to, court-ordered counselling or emotional service dog certification.
- The platform has made provision for referrals to a psychiatrist that will be consulting with clients via the Psychiatry portal, should a client need to be referred for a medical and or psychopharmacological assessment.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

DHT runs on a monthly subscription basis, where clients pay for sessions in advance. Failure to renew or honour such subscriptions will result in the pause or cancellation of their ability to perform any actions on the platform.



This functionality happens automatically, and can be reactivated the moment the funds are received by the third-party payment platform (PayFast) embedded by DHT.

Funds received by clients also serve as a motivation for their involvement in the therapeutic process, and therapist should therefore utilise this functionality to its full potential.

SCHEDULING

The platform is designed to be used in conjunction with your current calendar. It is therefore your responsibility to allocate times on your DHT calendar in advance to allow clients to select times to Meet with you via audio or video on the platform. This automates and streamlines the process, so that clients and therapists don't have to spend time scheduling in real-time. Clients could request different times from you via the Chat section, so please respond to their request on a timely manner.

CONTACT WITH CLIENTS

- Imagine that the client online is sitting in your practice and requires the same level of care with the same levels of ethics in mind.
- Online clients generally state what modality (text, audio, or video) they prefer, try to respect that, and not move onto a specific platform you prefer or are more comfortable with. If you find that you battle to connect on a relational level with your client, you can contact the DHT help centre for assistance to possibly refer this client to another therapist.

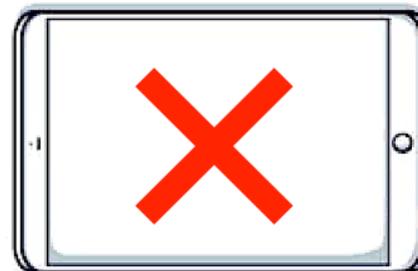
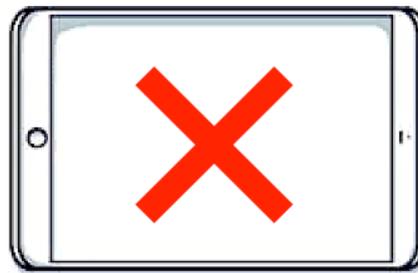
VIDEO

- Ensure that you have a blank or neutral background in your office to avoid unnecessary countertransference and to ensure uniformity across the platform.
- Make sure your microphone and video software as well as hardware remains on the appropriate standard as agreed upon when you applied to use the platform.



- Try to place your device on a solid platform or stand, to allow you to be “hands-free”, and to support a more natural posture for your client.
- Place your device upright to ensure the camera focuses from the top and not from the side. Professional Indemnity Insurers have received complaints that the client feels that the therapists focus is elsewhere, when the therapist was in fact focussing on the client’s visual on the screen, looking at the image of the client. This can be avoided when the camera does not focus from the left or right side, but from the top-front.

Illustration of an upright position so that camera is in the centre of your face, which allows for better eye contact with clients.



dynamic health
ONLINE COUNSELLING

TEXT-BASED TREATMENT

- Some clients may prefer to conduct their entire treatment via the chat system, which could be viewed as having a Professional Pen-Pal.
- Always use appropriate, professional language, as if you were speaking to a client face to face.
- Avoid using any form of emoticons/emojis or colloquialism. Research shows that it draws professionalism and credibility into question and might cause some clients to give you a low review or rating.
- Throughout contact with clients, practitioners should be cautious and should ensure that the language used is unambiguous, clear and avoids giving offence.
- Some tips:
 - Discuss and agree with your client to either message at the same time per day, and agree to reply at another but consistent time per day.
 - That way, the therapeutic process becomes like a delayed therapeutic session, and builds trust in the therapeutic relationship.

Due to the design of the DHT Platform, all interaction with clients can be conducted on the system. Therefore, do not hand out personal emails/numbers or contact information. Contact with clients can only be billed for if it occurs on the DHT platform, therefore avoid breaching the terms of use by handing out your details to clients. Also note the non-circumvention clause in your contract.

RESPONSE TIMES

To ensure that clients don't feel abandoned, the platform requires you to respond at least once every 8 hours within a business day cycle. Therefore check your text messages before End of Business each day. In addition, the therapist is required to schedule an audio and/or video session at least once a week, unless the client declines to do so. If such a deadline is not met, it will have a financial repercussion for the therapist, the client may be removed and referred to another therapist, or the therapist will be reevaluated for suitability on the platform. Please reach out and contact the support team should you battle with your current work load. Should you be on leave, you can block out such times in your diary on the DHT Platform to let clients know that you are not available, and so that support can place the client's subscription on hold, to avoid financial implication.



QUALITY ASSURANCE

As per the terms and conditions to both clients and therapists, sessions remain confidential between clients and therapist, nor are any audio and video sessions recorded on the platform (to improve and ensure the highest quality of security possible). However, clients do have the option to leave a public review of each therapist during or after the end of the therapeutic relationship. This should not serve to inflict anxiety for therapists, but rather to ensure the quality of work across the platform, and to support future clients to expect to be adequately supported. Therapists may log any concerns or queries for unreasonable reviews via the Counsellor portal.

ETHICS

- Please remember that all the relevant ethical guidelines stipulated by the HPCSA/SACSSP/SANC still apply.
- Please make sure that you go through the new ethical guidelines for telehealth as stipulated by the HPCSA, you are welcome to reference this document [here](#)
- It is also advised to discuss the concepts of confidentiality and consent with your client. You are welcome to reference the security section of this document to answer any questions posed by clients on the system.
- Each client will sign a comprehensive Consent Form upon registration. You are welcome to go through the document [here](#).

EQUIPMENT AND SETTING

- Ensure that you have a quiet, private, and safe space to conduct sessions, and preferably the same space every week as consistency builds trust in the process for your client.
- In addition to having a device not older than 5 years, and high-speed internet, we recommend getting a device that holds the device for you, as well as adequate lighting when doing video sessions.
- Make sure that you have all your resources, pens, note-pad, water etc at hand.



- Have a comfortable chair that sets you at ease, and that allows for comfort and little distraction.
- A good quality head set, or Bluetooth earphones minimises distraction during a session.

POTENTIAL CONCERNS FOR ONLINE THERAPY

- Your own anxiety could be a pitfall to your clinical success. Try to remain aware of it, and manage symptoms you may be experiencing.
- Some therapists and clients may be concerned about technical issues. As expert Online therapist Adrian Rhodes mentioned, technical issues are just like other distractions experienced in physical face-to-face sessions. They happen. Discuss a possible network outage or distraction with your client upon onset of your relationship. If a technical fault happens, send them a message in the secure messaging chat platform, or agree that you would make contact at your soonest availability to avoid the client feeling abandoned.
- It is important to set their mind at ease that you will not exit a therapeutic session deliberately, just like you won't walk out on a client if you were busy seeing them face-to-face.
- If you don't feel competent to conduct session after this document, you are welcome to contact the DHT team via email (info@dynamichealth.today) for supervision, or to be linked to our South-African ACTO chapter for further training.

MARKETING YOURSELF ON THE PLATFORM

As you know, tertiary programs rarely, if ever, include modules on practice management, financial management or marketing (both yourself and your services). Since the DHT platform takes care of the practice and financial management side of things, it is still up to you to advertise yourself and your services. We have however made it easier by including some areas of discussion and questions for you to elaborate on when setting up your profile. Try to be as honest and open about yourself (within the confines of professional conduct), since clients need to select your profile out of three potential candidates.



This might feel uncomfortable to some, and may not always fit the paradigm you work from, but just as client need to venture into vulnerability and out of their comfort zones to access therapy, you can give it your best shot. We look forward to connecting you to as many clients as you are able to see.

SUICIDAL AND AT-RISK CLIENTS

The DHT platform clearly states on the website and all social media that the platform is NOT intended for clients who have suicidal ideation, or are in danger. You will have access to the client's home town and address. You are therefore able to search for emergency rooms or psychiatric facilities in their area, should you ever need to do so.

We are excited to have you on board to be part of the main goal of making professional therapeutic services more accessible worldwide. Please don't hesitate to contact our support portal for assistance and remember watch the onboarding video on your dashboard once you have been signed in.

Kind Regards,
The DHT Team

Resources

Day, S. X., & Schneider, P. L. (2002). Psychotherapy using distance technology: A comparison of face-to-face, video, and audio treatment. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 49(4), 499-

Hull, T. D. (2015, June). A Preliminary Study of Talkspace's Text Based Therapy. Retrieved January, from <http://talkspace.com/online-therapy/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Talkspace->

