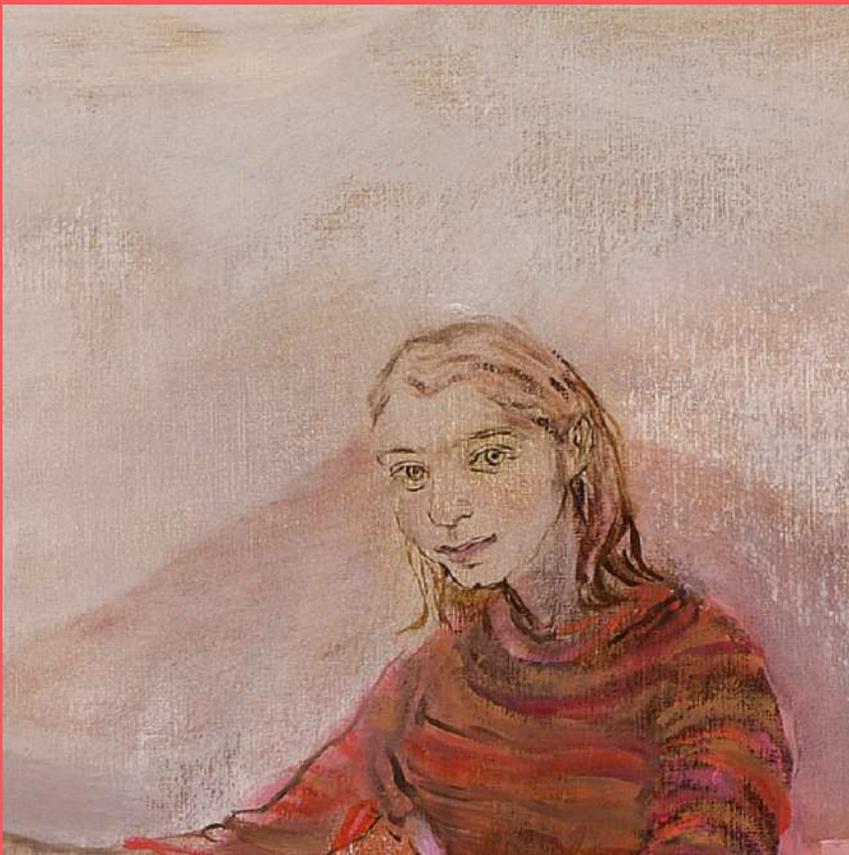


Emma Cameron, MA Dip.

# Online Therapy: An Introductory Guide for Art Psychotherapists



Essential Information for Art Psychotherapists  
Interested in Working Online

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## 9. Intake and Assessment

As a fully trained professional you will already be experienced and trained in assessing how well the client's needs and goals fit what you can offer.

Here's a checklist of some of the things to consider when a potential online client approaches you.

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For articles and information about various aspects of therapy, visit my website, <http://emmacameron.com>

# Introduction

What do Art Psychotherapists need to know about working online?

I've written this e-book as a short, basic introduction to some of the key things you need to know about working as a therapist online.

## What You'll Learn

This e-book covers the basics, including:

- Options and platforms for online therapy
- An introduction to legal & ethical issues
- Risk assessment for online working
- Informing and contracting with clients
- How to find out more about working online

This e-book is designed to help you begin to think about some of the basic aspects of delivering online therapy. However, it is not a substitute for a fully comprehensive training! I recommend you enhance your practice with specialist training in online therapy (see my Resources page).

Note: I'm trained, accredited and based in the UK, so please bear in mind that the information given may need to be adapted if you are outside the UK, in accordance with your national or State legislation.



Emma Cameron MA Dip. Integrative Arts Psychotherapy, Diploma in Online Therapy, Advanced Dip., HCPC reg. Art Psychotherapist, and UKCP reg. Integrative Arts Psychotherapist

# Disclaimer



The information shared in this e-book is written in good faith and is intended as an introductory guide to online working.

This e-book is not a substitute for professional training in delivery of online therapy. Art Therapists and others who read this e-book are expected to use their professional judgement and clinical expertise with regard to all therapy work that they undertake. Readers are strongly encouraged to undertake accredited training in delivering therapy online. The author, Emma Cameron, does not accept any liability for clinical decisions or actions taken as a result of reading this e-book. ©Emma Cameron 2017, 2018

# About The Author

Emma Cameron, MA, Dip., Adv. Dip. UKCP reg. HCPC



## Current practice

I am an Integrative Arts Psychotherapist in private practice, and also an established artist. I work with individual adult clients in traditional face-to-face (f2f) Art Psychotherapy, and with other clients in online therapy.

## Education & Credentials

I gained an MA with Distinction in Integrative Arts Psychotherapy from IATE in London. I also hold an Advanced Diploma in Therapeutic Application of the Arts and a BA(Honours) in Fine Art. I have a Diploma in Online Therapy (Distinction). I am an HCPC registered Art Psychotherapist and also a UKCP registered Integrative Arts Psychotherapist.

## My Online Presence

I have a website, [emmacameron.com](http://emmacameron.com), and I also enjoy connecting on social media with other therapists and the general public.

# Art Psychotherapists Working Online

Can we really use the arts in online therapy?



## Creative People Need Therapy

There are many, many creative people in the world: artists, writers, makers, poets, actors, architects, dancers, film-makers.... Not to mention all those who know they have a creative side to them, but who have been too inhibited or blocked to give it expression.

And these creative people can run into difficulties, experience trauma, and navigate tricky life changes, just as anyone else might. At these times, they may consider seeking online therapy.

They may have a sense that they need a therapist who values creativity in general, and who will respect and nurture their identity as a creative person. And who will help them use their creativity and imagination in the service of their recovery.

I have found that many creative people seeking online therapy prefer to choose an Art Psychotherapist, for these reasons.

You as an Art Psychotherapist will be able to recognise, honour and speak to a client's sense of the importance of art-making in their life. I have had clients who felt that previous counsellors or therapists couldn't engage with or understand that centrally important aspect of their life.

So, your being an Art Psychotherapist is very important for many clients.

## But is it really possible to practise Art Psychotherapy online?

The fact is, online Art Psychotherapy is in its infancy, and very little research has been done regarding best practice.

As Art Psychotherapists, we know the tremendous power that the image can hold. In face-to-face therapy, the artwork is normally retained and held securely by the therapist, and this physical containment is an important aspect of the work.

But when a client uses art materials during an online session, and then at the end of the session is left physically holding an artwork which may be a container for traumatic material and unconscious processes, I have some concerns around potential for harm.

Another important aspect of f2f Art Psychotherapy is in the provision of the art materials, and the actual physical handling of them. There are other related elements such as the containment, witnessing and responsiveness of the therapist in the room whilst the client is manipulating the art materials. This is of course going to have a different quality when it comes to distance working.

## Be Careful!

So my own inclination is to approach use of the arts in online therapy with caution, exercising careful clinical judgement. If in doubt, don't include art-making in your online sessions.

Personally, I don't work online in such a way that the art materials are the primary means of communication.

For online work, I draw on my psychotherapy and counselling training and reading, keeping the physical use of art materials minimal.

You may wish to call it 'Online Therapy' rather than 'Online Art Psychotherapy' because it isn't actually Art Psychotherapy as such.

## Alternatives to Art-Making

Instead of having the client using physical art materials in their room during their online session, I suggest you may like to consider one or more of the following ideas:

- Use verbal metaphor. Art Psychotherapists are highly skilled at eliciting, identifying and working with metaphors our clients use. This is our Superpower! Combine your counselling & psychotherapy skills, and your understanding of psychotherapy theories, with your ease and skilful handling of client metaphors, and you have a very powerful mix for facilitating change and growth in your clients.
- Having the client (and/or therapist) draw on the on-screen whiteboard within Zoom.
- The client creates their images outside of the session, and emails photos between sessions (for confidentiality, make sure they are able to password-protect their image, or use a system such as WeTransfer or Dropbox). The images can then be discussed in the session.
- The client can use the screen-share option on Zoom, allowing you both to look at an image together in the session. This can be used for any image that the client can access on their computer, such as a painting or photograph by themselves or by another artist.
- Having the client use you as their 'hands' so you manipulate sandtray objects, or art materials, on their behalf.
- Using a platform such as ProReal which allows a client to work in visual metaphor (this may only be financially viable if you are employed within an organisation that will pay for it).
- Working with avatars such as in Second Life.
- The client might create a Pinterest board which is set up as private, between the two of you.
- You might set up a private Dropbox folder which is only for the individual client and therapist to access, to house their images.

## The Relationship, and Other Factors

Remember that the tools of the Art Psychotherapist include:

- Counselling skills
- The therapeutic relationship
- The solid grounding in psychotherapy theory/ theories that you received during your training and beyond
- Recognition of the power of the Unconscious
- Clinical practice and experience
- A bedrock of extensive and deep personal work in your own psychotherapy
- Ongoing clinical supervision/ consultation

With these in place, you may come to feel, as I do, that it is not necessary to use art materials in online sessions.

# Online Modalities

Online therapy can take place in various ways.



# Video

Don't use Skype (it's not compliant with security requirements). Instead, try Zoom, VSee, Doxy.Me, or one of many other platforms that are suitable for online therapy.

For the best sound quality, and increased privacy, it's a good idea to use either earbuds with an included microphone, or a headset (such as the Logitech ClearChat Comfort/USB Headset).

Check the settings on your computer so that you don't get distracted by the sounds of alerts and notifications coming in.

And quit your email application, so you don't get any distracting notifications of incoming emails coming up on your screen during a session.

Video uses a higher bandwidth. You can check your download and upload speeds by going to <http://www.speedtest.net>.

Make sure that you have closed down other applications that use bandwidth, such as dropbox.

Ask anyone else in the house to avoid streaming videos etc, as this could affect the speed of your connection.

If possible, plug in an ethernet cable rather than using wifi. If there seems to be an unstable connection, turn off the video and switch to voice-only. If that is still unstable, you can stay on the platform but with video off and audio muted, and just use the Chat facility.

It's also possible to set things up so you and the client can see each other by video on Zoom, but one or both of you are simultaneously using phones for the audio: this cuts down on the bandwidth. You can use earbuds (with mic) plugged in to your mobile phone for this.

It's important to test all these out first with friends or family so that you are relaxed and confident with the technology options when you are working with clients.

## Email

Make sure all confidential or sensitive material is sent in a password-protected attachment, because email is not a secure means of communication.

Images may be sent via a platform such as WeTransfer or Dropbox.

## Live Chat (IRC)

Live Chat is when you use a platform such as Zoom to communicate synchronously (in real time) with a client via exchanges of text. Live Chat often surprises therapists who try it: you may find the work can go deeper than you might expect. A warning: time flies when you're using Live Chat, and the end of the session seems to arrive surprisingly fast!

## VOIP or Phone

VOIP stands for 'voice over internet provider'. You may wish to use voice-only via a platform like Zoom (you simply switch the video off).

Alternatively you can avoid internet altogether and just use a landline or mobile phone for the session.

# First of all...

What should you do first if you're thinking about working online?

- Register with the Information Commissioner's Office (<http://ico.org.uk>) (unless you're working only within an organisation which is already registered). Read through their data protection/ data handling guidelines carefully. There will be a fee to pay.
- Linked to the above, pay particular attention to the requirements of the GDPR (if you are in the UK or EU).
- Ensure that your Professional Indemnity Insurance specifically covers online work. Check for exemptions, for example you will not be covered for working with clients in certain countries or states (particularly the USA and Canada).
- Read through all the ethics guidelines for each professional organisation you belong to. Some will have specific additional guidelines for online working. It's also a good idea to read the guidelines that BACP have put together.
- Go through a risk assessment and identify any issues that need to be addressed (you'll find an example in this e-book).
- Create a list of other trusted therapists and organisations that you can refer a potential client to if you decide that you would not be a good fit for working with them.
- Have computer hardware and software that is as secure and as reliable as possible, and familiarise yourself with it as much as you can.
- Find a professional supervisor for your online work who is registered with ACTO and if possible, who is specifically qualified in online supervision.



# Risk Assessment

Before you start working online, it's important to assess and consider the risks involved in this kind of work - just as you would do when working face-to-face.

# Risk Assessment Checklist

Online therapy presents risks for both the client and the clinician.

At a minimum, you will need to consider the items on this checklist. There may be several things here that you hadn't thought about.

Remember, this list is not exhaustive and you might think of some other considerations to add to your risk assessment.

Make sure you are doing the following:

## Technology

- Taking technological security precautions such as virus checkers, firewalls, encryption, and password security, so that data storage and transfer is as secure as possible.
- Managing your social media and general online presence (Tip: try googling your name, so you can be aware of what's out there). Regularly check what is visible to the public, e.g. on your Facebook profile. Settings on your social media accounts may need to be updated from time to time.
- Planning for what happens if the technology fails (this will include options for proceeding with a session by another means, e.g. using voice-only, live chat, phone, email etc)
- Checking that your computer or device is compatible with technology the client uses.
- Ensuring that the client is reasonably comfortable and confident with using the necessary technology.
- Considering how to minimise the risks of confidential or sensitive data being seen by someone else (such as the person who repairs your computer, or any bookkeeper, accountant or bank staff who may look at your accounts and finances).
- Keeping up-to-date, through CPD, with issues around use of technology, ethics, and best practice around online therapy.

- Make sure you are using a platform that is suitable for therapeutic purposes. Some software (eg Skype) is not compliant with the requirements of data security legislation, and is therefore not suitable for therapeutic purposes. At the time of writing, security-compliant platforms include Zoom, VSee, and Doxy.me, amongst others. If you are in the USA, you will need to find HIPAA compliant platforms.

## Legal & Jurisdiction

- Familiarising yourself with national laws, for example in the UK the Terrorism Act 2006, the Road Traffic Act 1998, The Consumer Contracts Regulations 2014, Data Protection Act 1998, The Children Act 1989 and 2004, and regulations concerning the rights of Vulnerable Adults. All of these (and potentially other laws) could have repercussions for online therapy.
- Registering or re-registering with ICO (Information Commissioner's Office) as required by the Data Protection Act and GDPR.
- Stating on your client agreement which jurisdiction you are working under (e.g. England & Wales, or Scotland, etc).
- If you plan to work internationally, you should familiarise yourself with legal aspects of international working. For example, you need specific State Licensure to work in the USA and certain other countries; and in some countries online psychotherapy is prohibited.
- You should also be aware that international laws can differ greatly with regard to things such as same-sex relationships, domestic abuse, and child protection. This may mean that receiving online counselling could put a client at additional risk, making online therapy contra-indicated.

## Therapist's Workplace Safety

- Assessing physical hazards (eg trip hazards from trailing wires; back or wrist problems caused by working at a computer).
- Considering personal safety (e.g. being stalked or threatened).

## Risk of Harm to the Client

- Clarifying limitations of competence, and having a clear plan for how you'd refer a client on to another therapist or agency.
- Communicating to the client through informed consent, the basic boundaries and limits to therapy.

- Getting details of the client's geographical address, phone number, GP, and a contact person.
- If the client is not at their usual address for their session, getting the address at the start of the session so that you would be able to direct emergency services there in the case of suicidal ideation or a health crisis during a session.
- Assessing the client's risk to self or other (including suicide, violence, child abuse, substance use, self-harm, self-neglect, social isolation/ support, etc).
- Making sure the client is clear that you are not providing a constant on-call crisis service, and giving them some organisations that might help them in a crisis.
- If you are working internationally, doing some research around contacting emergency services in the client's local area.
- If the client is currently in a relationship which has features of coercive control or domestic violence, ensuring that the sessions do not expose the client to any additional risk.

## Other

- Creating a client contract which the client can sign and return.
- Having a clear procedure for handling payments, for example, when you expect to be paid, and how (including procedures for international money transfers).
- Record-keeping: being clear about what records you keep, with reference to (a) requirements/ advice from your professional organisation(s) and (b) data handling and data storage laws and guidelines, such as GDPR.
- Getting clear in your own mind about your boundaries regarding between-session contact.
- Thinking through the practical risks of any potential client use of art materials.
- Thinking through the psychological risks of client retention of art images which contain symbolic, projective and transference significance.

This risk assessment was developed based on the risk assessment tool offered by PWT academy. Visit <http://pwtacademy.online> for more information, or read Chapter 8, *Establishing an Online Practice* in Weitz, P. (2014) *Psychotherapy 2.0: Where Psychotherapy and Technology Meet*

# Intake and Assessment

As a fully trained professional you will already be experienced and trained in assessing how well the client's needs and goals fit what you can offer.

Here's a checklist of some of the things to consider when a potential online client approaches you.

Read through the list and add in anything else that strikes you as important or relevant.

## The client's suitability for online therapy

- Their ease with technology
- Their ability to secure privacy for their sessions
- Psychological-mindedness
- Their mental health history
- Other treatment they may be receiving
- Medications
- Dissociative disorders, etc
- Any language barriers
- Time zone differences
- Fragile ego states
- Their social and support networks
- Their use of alcohol or drugs
- Legal/ Jurisdiction restrictions pertaining to their country of residence
- Whether this client needs a team of professionals around them rather than a sole practitioner
- Suicidal ideation/ Self-harm
- The client's ability to pay for therapy

## Your own suitability for working with this client:

- Your level of training and experience in conducting psychotherapy and counselling that is not based around art-making (e.g. are you knowledgeable and skilled enough to practise as a psychotherapist even when no art materials are used?)
- Your availability
- Your attitude to risk (e.g., are you willing to work with suicidal ideation or self-harm, etc?)
- Any possible prejudices you may hold towards this client group
- Your own expertise, or lack of it (e.g. couples, under-18's, personality disorders, eating disorders, dissociative disorders, etc)

# Who Can Help the Online Therapist?

Professional support for online therapists in private practice can come from various places. It is important to know that you are not alone.

## Supervisor

The clinical supervisor you use for your online work will ideally:

- Be familiar with the theory and practice of the therapy modalities you use
- Practice online therapy him/herself
- Understand how therapy and the therapeutic relationship may be affected by the online environment
- Be competent with the technology
- Have a minimum of a Diploma-level qualification in online therapy
- Have a qualification in Online Supervision

## Professional Organisations

Check the guidelines regarding online working for each professional organisation and accrediting body that you belong to, for example:

- HCPC
- BAAT
- UKCP
- BACP
- Your original training institution

Do not be afraid to contact the organisations for support when (or before) you have an ethical, legal or other question around online working.

# Professional Indemnity Insurance

Your professional indemnity insurance should:

- Specifically state that you are covered for online working.
- Have further guidelines etc that you can read.
- Be able to arrange consultation for you where necessary, in cases of query or complaints.

## Additional Training

You can regularly update your knowledge and skills, and enhance your clinical practice, through

- Specialist CPD trainings
- Discussion groups
- Reading books and articles related to online therapy
- Attending conferences such as OCTIA
- Studying for a Certificate in Online Therapy or (ideally) a Diploma in Online Therapy.

# Client Contract

What should your client contract include?

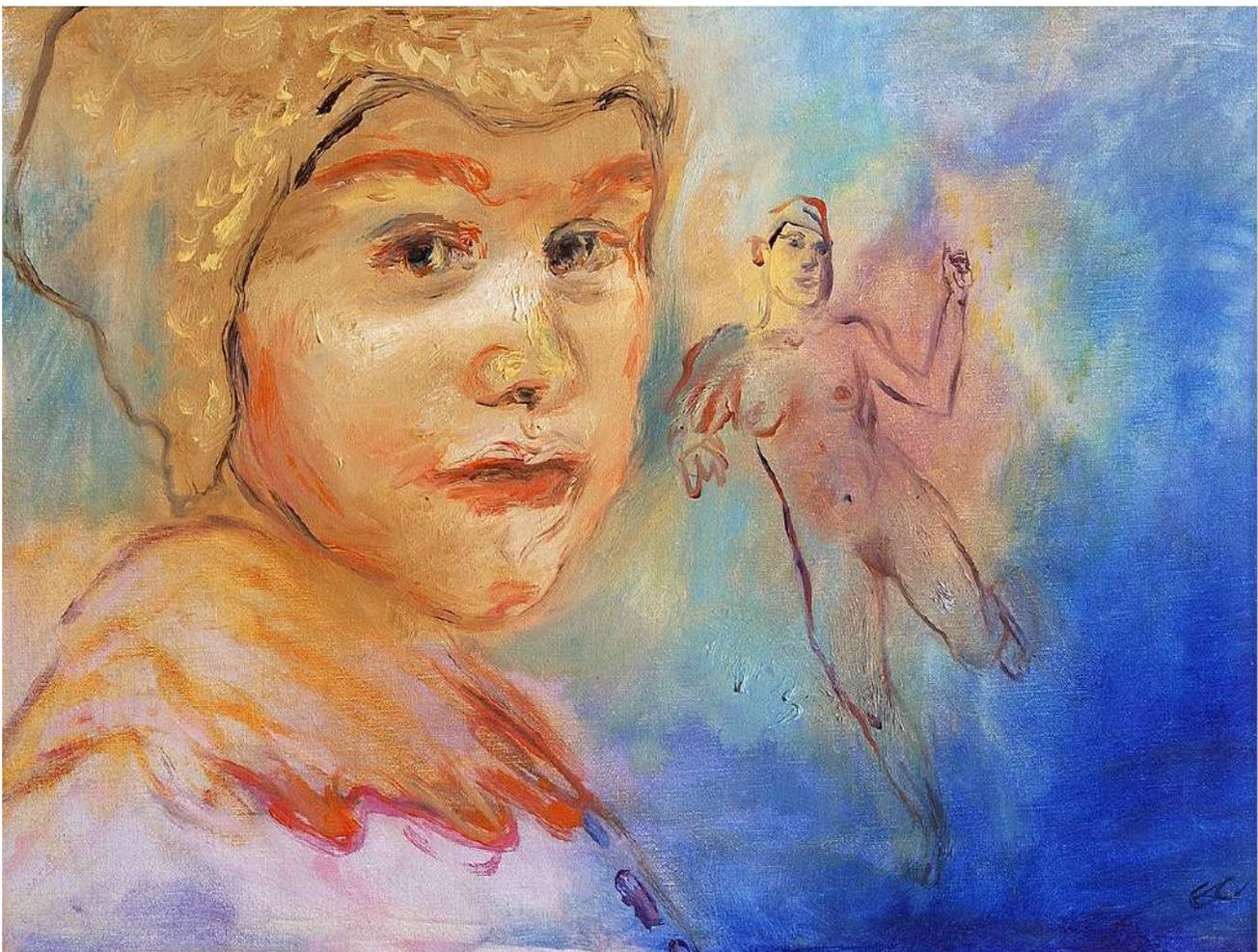
- Client's contact and personal details
- GP name, address, phone
- Next of kin/ person to be informed in case of need
- Session boundaries/ frame
- Social media policy
- What the client should do if they feel misunderstood etc
- Fall-back options for if the technology fails
- Payment arrangements
- Cancellations and ending therapy
- Contact between sessions
- Emergency support
- Confidentiality and security
- Mental health history/ diagnoses/ treatments/ medications
- General health issues and medications
- Permission to contact GP or other services
- What the client might need to consider regarding how they maintain privacy and confidentiality (e.g. not being overheard or interrupted, using a headset, ensuring their screen cannot be viewed through a window, etc)



# Embodiment in Cyberspace

Art Psychotherapists have always known that there isn't really a separation between the 'mental' and the 'physical'.

In online work, where we are not in the same physical space as the client, how do we include the body?



Here are some ways that you might include embodiment in online therapy:

- Attend to your embodied countertransference responses. Consider telling the client something about these IF clinically appropriate.
- Regularly invite the client to attend to their embodied in-the-moment experience, and to tell you about it.

- Ask the client to use metaphor and sense-based language to describe bodily sensations and embodied emotional experience.
- Teach clients exercises for emotional regulation (e.g. grounding and stabilising techniques; affect labelling).
- With sensitivity, you might comment on your perceptions of the client's facial expression, voice tone, etc.
- Some therapists like to ask that they can see their client from the waist up; others prefer a closer view of the face.

# More Things to Think About

Some additional issues that you will need to consider before you get started...

Remember, we don't know what we don't know.

There will be aspects to conducting therapy online that you will never have thought about.

The risk assessment I have offered gives you a good starting-point.

One thing that hasn't been mentioned yet, but needs to be, because it is a central aspect of online therapy, is the '**disinhibition effect**'. This is the phenomenon that people do and say things online that they might never say or do face-to-face.

It is very important to research and be aware of the disinhibition effect, because it **will** affect you and your clients.

Due to the disinhibition effect, clients may open up more quickly and get to the nub of their problems; however, this may frighten them and they may bolt from therapy or suffer an acute 'vulnerability hangover'.

Therapists too may find a disinhibition effect subtly influencing some aspects of their work, so it's good to be informed and vigilant about this.

Again, I want to emphasise the value of training in online therapy. See the 'Resources' page for more details on how to access training.

# Resources

There are plenty of resources for therapists interested in working online.

Please note that things are constantly changing in the online world, and some of these links may go out of date.

## Further Training

I strongly recommend that you seek out specialist training in conducting therapy online. This e-book does not address details of how to manage online clinical interactions. This is not only because of lack of space, but also because I value so highly the learning and development that emerges from engaging in discussions and active learning in a group training situation.

PWT@cademy <http://pwtacademy.online>

The Online Therapy Institute <http://onlinetherapyinstitute.com>

The Zur Institute <http://www.zurinstitute.com>

## Recommended Reading

Weitz, P., (2014) Psychotherapy 2.0: Where Psychotherapy and Technology Meet. London: Karnac

Balick, A. (2014) The Psychodynamics of Social Networking: connected-up; instantaneous culture and the self. London, Karnac

Anthony, K., & Nagel, D.M. (2010). Therapy Online: A Practical Guide. London: Sage

Russell, G.I. (2015). Screen Relations: The Limits of Computer-Meditated Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy. London: Karnac

# Online Resources

Roy Huggins, Person Centered Tech

The Online Counselling Podcast <http://www.onlinecounselling.com/podcasts/>

PWT@cademy <http://pwtacademy.online>

Online Therapy Hub <https://privatepracticehub.co.uk/onlinetherapyhub/>

Dr Keely Kolmes: Social Media Policy <http://drkkolmes.com/forms/>

## Resources for Clients

Befrienders Worldwide <http://www.befrienders.org>

Big White Wall (Support Network for Emotional Health)

<http://www.bigwhitewall.com/landing-pages/default.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2f>

British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP) [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

Childline <http://www.childline.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

International Society for Mental Health Online <http://ismho.org>

Mind <http://www.mind.org.uk>

MindEd (E-learning to support young healthy minds) <https://www.minded.org.uk>

Royal College of Psychiatry (Mental health information)

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice.aspx>

Papyrus <http://www.papyrus-uk.org>

Psychnet (Mental health & Psychology Portal) <http://www.psychnet-uk.com>

Samaritans <http://www.samaritans.org>

Students Against Depression <http://studentsagainstdepression.org>

# Consultation/ Supervision

ACTO <http://www.acto-uk.org/seeking-a-supervisor/>

## Directories

ACTO: Association of Counsellors & Therapists Online <http://www.acto-uk.org>

Online Counselling Directory <http://www.onlinecounselling.com>

Online Therapy Hub <https://privatepracticehub.co.uk/onlinetherapyhub/>

Psychology Today [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com)

Therapy Index (Global) [www.therapyindex.com](http://www.therapyindex.com)

# Contact me

For articles and information about various aspects of therapy, visit my website, <http://emmacameron.com>

Visit [emma.cameron.com](http://emma.cameron.com)