SCPTI
Scarborough Counselling & Psychotherapy Training Institute

Online Working Policy

Introduction

This policy sets out how SCPTI expects trainees, graduates, staff and supervisors to work online and remotely, safely and ethically. It covers any therapeutic or training contact that does not take place in person, including video, telephone, email, text messaging and live chat.

The policy is written in line with the UKCP Guidelines for Working Online or Remotely (2021), the UKCP Code of Ethics and Professional Practice (2019) and the SCPTI Code of Ethics and Professional Practice for Trainees and Graduates. The SCPTI Code of Ethics applies in full to online work, just as it does to work in person.

Who this policy applies to

- trainees on the Diploma in Relational Integrative Psychotherapy, the Diploma in Relational Gestalt Psychotherapy and the Relational Psychotherapeutic Counselling Diploma
- graduates and professional members accredited through SCPTI
- Executive Directors, Heads of Course, tutors, Associate Teaching Members and administrative staff
- supervisors and personal therapists working with SCPTI trainees, in so far as their work affects trainees' course requirements

Our approach

SCPTI's training is relational, and our courses are taught in person in Scarborough. We believe that in-person work remains the foundation of relational practice. We also recognise that online and remote work has real value. It widens access for clients and trainees who live at a distance, who have caring responsibilities, or who have a disability or health condition that makes travel difficult. It can also suit some clients better than in-person work.

For these reasons SCPTI allows a limited proportion of trainees' clinical work, supervision and personal therapy to take place remotely, as set out below and in each diploma's handbook. Online work is not a lesser form of practice. It needs its own competence, preparation and attention in supervision.

Online client work by trainees

Trainees may only work with clients online or by telephone once they have been signed off as ready to practise under the SCPTI Readiness and Fitness to Practise Policy. Before seeing any client remotely, the trainee must:

- complete appropriate training in online and remote work, for example through the UKCP training hub or the Open University, and keep evidence of it in their Training Log
- discuss their readiness to work remotely with their clinical supervisor and their course tutor or Head of Course
- have their clinical supervisor's agreement to take clinical responsibility for the client work done remotely
- confirm that their professional indemnity insurance covers online and remote work, including the place where each client is located

- update their client contract to cover remote working

The proportion of client hours that may be done remotely over the whole training differs between the diplomas. This is deliberate and reflects the requirements of each modality.

Diploma in Relational Integrative Psychotherapy: up to 20% of client hours may be done remotely.

Diploma in Relational Gestalt Psychotherapy: at least 60% of client hours must be in person, and up to 40% may be online or by telephone.

Relational Psychotherapeutic Counselling Diploma: up to 20% of client hours may be done remotely.

Trainees record in-person and remote client hours separately in their Training Log, and tutors check the balance at tutorials.

Online supervision and personal therapy

The limits on remote supervision and personal therapy are set out in each diploma's handbook. In summary, Relational Gestalt Psychotherapy trainees must have at least 30% of supervision in person, with up to 70% online, and at least 60% of personal therapy in person, with up to 40% remote. Relational Psychotherapeutic Counselling trainees must have their clinical supervision face to face, in line with the relational nature of the course; supervision by video is only allowed if outside circumstances, such as government restrictions, prevent in-person meetings.

Supervisors must only offer online supervision if they are competent to do so. Trainees and members whose supervisor cannot support their online work must arrange additional supervision that can.

Assessing whether online work is suitable

Practitioners must assess each client's suitability for online work before starting, and keep that under review. Online work may not suit clients at high risk of harm to themselves or others, clients with active psychosis or substance misuse, or clients without a private space. Practitioners must have a plan for referring clients who are unsuitable for online work or who need more support. Clients who move from in-person to online work should be reassessed, as the change can affect the work.

A risk assessment is required for every client seen online. At the start of the work the practitioner records the client's full name, date of birth, telephone number, the address where they will be during sessions, and the details of a trusted safety contact. The practitioner explains, as a routine part of the contract, when they would use this information, for example if they believed the client was at serious risk.

Contracting and consent

Before online work begins, the practitioner gives the client clear written information about how the work will take place and obtains the client's explicit, informed consent. The contract should cover:

- the platform to be used, the equipment needed and who starts each session
- what will happen if the connection fails (see below)
- the client's private space and how interruptions will be handled
- how and when the practitioner may contact the client between sessions, including permission to send texts or emails such as appointment reminders

- that neither party will record sessions without the other's explicit written consent
- fees, secure payment methods, cancellations, and the client's right to cancel within 14 days under the Consumer Contracts Regulations
- the limits of confidentiality, which are the same as for in-person work
- how to complain, through the practitioner's professional body

Confidentiality, security and data protection

Confidentiality needs even more care online than in person. Practitioners must:

- use a secure, reputable platform with end-to-end encryption, and avoid free platforms that do not offer adequate security
- work from a private room where they cannot be seen or overheard, using headphones where needed
- check the client's identity at the first session, and confirm they are speaking to the right person before identifying themselves when returning a call
- use password-protected devices that are not shared with family members, and keep antivirus and security software up to date
- keep professional email separate from personal email, keep clinical content out of emails as far as possible, and password-protect any confidential attachment
- store notes, recordings and contact details securely, and delete them in line with their privacy notice and the SCPTI Data Protection, Management and Retention Policy
- be registered with the Information Commissioner's Office where required and have a privacy notice that covers online work

Recordings of client work made for assignments or supervision need the client's explicit written consent, must be stored securely and must be deleted once they are no longer needed for that purpose.

When the technology fails

The practitioner and client agree in advance what they will do if the connection drops or the platform fails. Usually the practitioner will try to reconnect for an agreed time, then telephone the client on a number agreed beforehand. If contact cannot be restored, the practitioner follows up by an agreed method to rearrange. If a connection fails at a moment of risk, the practitioner follows the risk plan agreed at the start of the work.

Working across borders

When a client is outside the UK, the practitioner must comply with the law where the client is located as well as UK law, and check that their insurance covers that country. The contract should state that the work is governed by the law of England and Wales and that complaints are heard in the UK. Practitioners should consider whether registration is needed in the client's country, take care with time zones, and include platform security and local surveillance or censorship in their risk assessment.

Children, young people and adults at risk

Online work with children and young people needs extra care and is subject to the SCPTI Safeguarding Policy and Procedure. Practitioners must obtain consent from parents or carers where needed, consider the child's age, development and home environment, and discuss safeguarding concerns promptly in supervision. Trainees may only work online with children or young people if this is agreed by their supervisor and Head of Course and is within their training and competence.

Graduates and professional members

Graduates and professional members are responsible for working online only within their competence, for keeping up relevant CPD, for making sure their supervision covers their online work, and for following the UKCP Guidelines for Working Online or Remotely. Online work is discussed as part of reaccreditation under the SCPTI CPD and Reaccreditation Policy.

SCPTI's own online activity

SCPTI teaches its diplomas in person. Some activities take place online: some tutorials, some first interviews with overseas applicants (followed by an in-person meeting before a place is confirmed), and some staff, committee and Board meetings. For these, SCPTI staff will use a secure platform, join from a private space, and keep personal information about trainees and applicants confidential in line with the SCPTI Data Protection, Management and Retention Policy. Online teaching or meetings are not recorded without the agreement of everyone present. Reasonable adjustments are made for anyone who needs them to take part online.

Wellbeing

Online work can be tiring and can stretch practitioners' comfort zones. Practitioners should take regular breaks from screens, plan their timetable to avoid fatigue, and use supervision and personal therapy to reflect on the effect of online work on themselves and their practice. The SCPTI Lone Working Policy also applies to practitioners working alone from home.

Concerns and breaches

Concerns about a trainee's online practice are addressed under the SCPTI Readiness and Fitness to Practise Policy. A complaint about online work by anyone covered by this policy is handled under the SCPTI Complaints Procedure.

Related policies

- SCPTI Code of Ethics and Professional Practice for Trainees and Graduates
- SCPTI Social Media Policy
- SCPTI Data Protection, Management and Retention Policy
- SCPTI Safeguarding Policy and Procedure
- SCPTI Lone Working Policy
- SCPTI Readiness and Fitness to Practise Policy
- SCPTI CPD and Reaccreditation Policy
- the trainee handbooks for each diploma

- UKCP Guidelines for Working Online or Remotely (2021)

Review

This policy is reviewed every 12 months and updated at least every 36 months, or sooner if UKCP guidance or the law changes.

Last reviewed October 2026