An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

Continuity of Guidance Counselling

Guidelines for schools providing online support for students

April 2020

Table of Contents

Guidelines for online guidance counselling and one-to-one support

Introduction

All schools and further education settings are currently closed under Covid-19 restrictions. The information in this document from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) is being put in place as a contingency measure to support the continuity of guidance counselling in the event of an extension to public health measures.

The guidelines contained in this document are primarily intended to support post-primary school leaders as they plan for the continuity of guidance counselling support using technology or via the internet. These guidelines serve to raise awareness of the complex issues which must be considered before online guidance counselling or other 1:1 support is delivered. These guidelines can also inform the development of guidelines for the provision of guidance counselling online in the Further Education and Training sector.

While the points raised in this document will have particular importance for guidance counsellors, they will also be relevant to other members of staff providing online 1:1 teaching and learning support during this unprecedented COVID-19 situation. The care structures in schools have developed to include year heads, special education teachers, chaplains, academic monitors and other subject teachers who engage with students in a 1:1 capacity.

Online provision of support is increasingly used by teachers and guidance counsellors and research in the field indicates that many people value and benefit from it. This is not to suggest that it can, or should, supersede conventional face to face work with students.

The Minister has advised of steps taken by the Department to minimise the impact of the current school closures on teaching and learning. All schools have been asked to continue to plan lessons and, where possible, provide online resources for students or online lessons where equipped to do so. Schools have also been asked to be conscious of students that may not have access to online facilities and to consider this actively in their continuity of education responses. Schools are asked to prioritise supporting exam classes as they to continue to prepare for State examinations.

As technology is evolving at a very fast pace, it would be impossible to provide information here about every facet of it, or to give answers to the many issues which individual teachers

may encounter while using technology. It is expected that decisions will be made at a local level in the unique context of the school, available technology, and the needs of students. School leaders and guidance counsellors should discuss and agree the nature and provision of guidance counselling during this period of school buildings closure.

'Working online' is used in this document to include all methods of communication using digital and information technology regardless of whether equipment used is a desktop computer, laptop, tablet, smartphone or any other device. 'Working online' is also sometimes referred to as 'working at a distance' to establish a distinction from working in the physical presence of the other person.

Evans (2009) refers to methods of online communication which are conducted in real time as synchronous and describes communication where there is a delayed reaction as asynchronous (Evans, 2009: 88, 89).

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) has developed online courses and resources prepared specifically to help teachers as they continue to teach and support their students' learning online during school closures due to COVID-19. Many schools have online systems suitable for this type of support and other schools are encouraged to visit the PDST site to learn more about a wide range of available platforms and apps.
https://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Technology/

School leaders are requested to keep their schools operating as much as normal in the online world as their online systems and platforms permit.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP). The *IACP Recommended Approach for Online Counselling and Psychotherapy* guidelines have been adapted and, in some cases, extracts have been reproduced in this document.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank the team at the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) for the professional and ongoing support they provide to the Department and for guidance counsellors. The various information links and webinars indicated in this document will support guidance counsellors to provide effective guidance counselling online.

Focus of these Guidelines

The following areas are the principal focus of these guidelines:

1. Guidance counsellor competence, available training, and continued supervision
2. Contracts, consent and student suitability
3. Specific issues relating to working online
4. Professional and legal considerations and issues of jurisdiction
5. GDPR - Confidentiality and security
6. Protocols for security and appropriate platforms to assure safety and misuse

Methods of communication

The purpose of this document is to offer guidelines for good practice in several specific areas and contexts. These include:

- Telephone guidance counselling where the context is verbal exchange between student and guidance counsellor, and is conducted in real time

- Email: Private written communication between student and guidance counsellor where there is a delayed response. Messages can be composed and sent at any time by either student or guidance counsellor

- Generic voice applications: Communication through conversation conducted in real time via the internet

- Generic video applications: Communication is both verbal and visual and is conducted in real time via the internet

- Instant messaging: Real time programme which notifies when contacts are online. The messages written in return are received instantly

- Forums: Delayed response private communication with students using web -based software

Positive aspects of working online with students

Online support suits some students and the flexibility in terms of timing is also attractive to many students. Students with certain additional challenges, including isolation, disability or those engaging in social distancing will obviously benefit from the provision of online help.

These guidelines are meant to address a range of issues which are specific to distance technology and the provision of support. They are not designed to suggest that this mode of delivery is preferable to conventional face to face teaching or guidance counselling.

1. Guidance counsellor competence, available training, and continued supervision

1.1 Online practice as a specialised area of Guidance Counselling

It is recommended that guidance counsellors would avail of training in this specialised area of online guidance counselling before embarking on this type of work, if it is new to them. Guidance counsellors are encouraged to upskill to the best of their capability in terms of using online school systems, distance learning and communication applications. Online training tutorials are available on the PDST and NCGE websites (see below).

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE), as an agency of the Department of Education and Skills, provides resources to support good practice and CPD for guidance counsellors working in post primary and further education and training sectors.

Guidance counsellors can visit other local and international professional bodies' websites where they can read articles about online counselling and provision of distance support (See references section).

An important point is that some models of support appear to work more effectively than others online, this means that the limitations of each guidance counsellor's situation should be a major consideration before making a decision to work in this way.

It is important that students are provided with explicit and relevant details about the guidance counsellor's methods of working along with information about what outcomes could be expected if support proceeds.

Online CPD and Webinars

PDST
The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) has developed online courses and resources prepared specifically to help teachers as they continue to teach and support their students' learning online during school closures due to COVID-19.

Distance learning resources   https://www.pdst.ie/DistanceLearning

Technology in education   https://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Technology/

NCGE

The NCGE has developed and collated a variety of useful resources, including, articles, recorded webinars and information notes about guidance counselling, incorporating distance and online support.

Main Support Page
https://www.ncge.ie/covid-19/support

Post Primary Support Page
https://www.ncge.ie/covid-19/support/post-primary

Post Primary Resources Section (Covid-19)
https://www.ncge.ie/covid-19/support/post-primary/resources

In this section you will find (amongst other resources) the following:

- *NCGE Support Information for Guidance Counsellors in Schools: COVID – 19 School Closures 2020 (PDF Document)*
- *Accompanying presentation to (these) DES Guidelines & NCGE Information for Schools document (Video Presentation)*
- *Supervision: Information for Supervisors and Guidance Counsellors (PDF Document)*
- *Developing a Confidentiality Policy for Post-Primary Schools (Editable PDF Template)*
- *Record Templates for Guidance Counselling One-to-One Meetings with Students (Editable PDF Templates)*
- *'An Introduction to Technology Enhanced Guidance' (Recorded Webinar)*
- *'Telephone and Remote Platform Approaches to Career Development' (Recorded Webinar)*

The following may also be useful to guidance counsellors as they plan the adapted guidance programme.

School Guidance Handbook
https://www.ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook

FET Guidance Handbook
https://www.ncge.ie/FET-guidance-handbook

The NCGE team is available should school management or a guidance counsellor have any questions.
Contact details are:
Tel: + 353 1 8690715
Email: ncgeinfo@ncge.ie

1.2 Guidance counsellor experience

The range of issues students may bring to online sessions means that experience and training are essential requirements for anyone wanting to work with students in this context. In the Irish school system guidance counselling is provided through a holistic model of delivery. The Education Act (1998) Section 9c states that a school shall use its available resources to ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices.

Guidance in schools "refers to a range of learning experiences provided in developmental sequence that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the three separate, but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance." (DES, 2005, pg. 4).

When planning the provision of 1:1 online support, guidance counsellors are reminded of the balance to be achieved in supporting students with education, career, or social and personal concerns.

Guidance counsellors should continue to follow professional Codes of Ethics, recognise professional boundaries and exercise due caution not to exceed the limits of their role as a guidance counsellor. This stated principle applies to technological ways of working with students, just as it applies to other, more traditional approaches.

Online support for students deserves the same level of expertise and commitment as face to face. It is therefore the duty of teachers and guidance counsellor's to be aware of regulatory issues, including data protection, school procedures, confidentiality, and to inform potential students of these.

1.3 Specialist training

Effective work online necessitates proficiency in IT skills, and an awareness of how electronic data and information are stored, along with the ethical and legal requirements of service delivery.

• Competence in the maintenance of electronic information and the safeguarding of student records is an essential component of online support. Security and confidentiality are basic components of online work, and guidance counsellors should be proficient in the skills necessary to ensure they are never compromised.

• The following is a summary of other essential considerations:

• Due to the absence of visual and auditory signals, communication via email presents certain difficulties which are not present in face to face support with students, and necessitates the development of further guidance counsellor skills and training in this context

• Understanding of student dis-inhibition and over-disclosure. Students sometimes disclose information and emotion very quickly online. Guidance counsellors need to understand the dynamics underpinning this kind of response so that they can work effectively with students who exhibit it

• Clarification as an aid to understanding. In order to avoid mistakes or misunderstanding, guidance counsellors should be aware of the importance of greater clarification when communicating with students via email or telephone

• Awareness of fantasy and idealisation of the guidance counsellor by the student (which may be erotic or romantic) and stems from the increased transference and projection accompanying online support

• How to proceed when students 'disappear' through change of email addresses or other contact details

• The importance of internet etiquette - '*netiquette*' or the rules of online etiquette, and how this applies to posting messages and replies online

• How to maintain a responsible 'presence' online, especially in relation to personal guidance counsellor details which may compromise the individual or that of the profession

• Consider the wider ethical implications of working online, especially in relation to the instigation of dual relationships with students through social networking sites. Follow the school policy in relation to acceptable use of these sites.

• All information provided on the school's website including the guidance counselling section should be clear, unambiguous and up to date.

1.4 Proficiency in the use of technology

It is the responsibility of school management to ensure that the technology approved for school use is safe and fit for purpose. This includes ensuring that anti-virus, firewall, encryption and spam blocking software are all in place. It also means ongoing maintenance of other technological tools necessary for safe practice with students. In addition, students should be made aware of system requirements and warned of the risks of technological failure and how to protect against this. As part of the initial assessment procedure, students should be given all the information necessary to avoid threats to their privacy and to ensure their safety online. This information to students should include:

• The importance of using a personal computer with firewall and anti-virus protection installed

• The importance of encryption, where possible, so that information received is confidential

• The need for password protection for access to computer and email account

• To avoid sending or receiving emails at Wi-Fi hotspots unless sure that connection is secure

• Checking the 'to' address field before clicking to 'send'

Where possible, the school online system should be used in order to plan, schedule and deliver 1:1 meetings. In the case where a school does not currently operate a platform which would support a virtual one-to-one meeting, "Skype," "Microsoft Teams" or "Google" are examples of systems that could be explored for this purpose (further information on the use of such platforms is available from the NCGE). GDPR and security of personal data should be considered, including risks associated with data managed or stored outside the EU. Any decision to use a system outside the normal school platform should be approved by school management.

1.5 Supervision and professional support

Guidance counsellors have a duty to ensure that their work is adequately supervised in a way that will support their work with online students.

The way in which guidance counsellors receive supervision is a consideration and may represent a choice between face to face supervision and supervision online. There is currently no firm consensus about which is preferable, though online supervision seems more suitable since it serves to uncover parallel processes and other important dynamics when both guidance counsellor and supervisor are working in the same medium.

Guidance counsellors engaged in the provision of 1-1 guidance counselling will be supported through an online group supervision model. See attached document for further information - *letter from Monaghan Education Centre.*

Supervisors will be supported to ensure they have a comprehensive understanding of the role of the guidance counsellor and all the issues, both theoretical and practical, which impinge on the guidance counsellor's work with online students. Guidance counsellors too, will recognise that they need a level of competence and expertise to support online work with students.

There are pressures which are unique to online work with students, which means that guidance counsellors are advised to consider their personal self-care as a valid priority and a necessary prerequisite for maintaining safe practice with students. Maintaining self-care (and by extension safe practice) includes, among other things, being aware of boundaries, especially in relation to guidance counsellor availability and response to students. Guidance counsellors should also be aware of guidelines on supervision in their Code of Ethics, which outlines the responsibility of both supervisor and supervisee.

2. Contracting and student suitability

2.1 Assessment of suitability for online support

Schools have a duty to follow guidelines for identification of students who are suitable for (and are likely to benefit from) contact online. Some students may not have the level of computer literacy needed to benefit from online support, while others may lack the communication skills and general literacy required for this medium.

Groups or individual students may be prioritised. Decisions about social personal support should be made in consultation with school management and the student support team following the normal school referral procedures. Best practice is to follow the NEPS Guidelines regarding the operation of Student Support Teams which includes templates which can be used as part of formal referral procedures.

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Student-Support-Teams-in-Post-Primary-Schools.pdf

Target groups may include sixth year students, or any other group of students identified by school management and the guidance counsellor. For example, schools might decide that other priority groups could include Transition Year students, or third year students who are making important decisions about subject and programme options.

Students, who, because of disability, have restricted access to online support, may not benefit from online provision either. If prospective students seem unlikely to benefit from this approach, procedures should be in place to guide them towards appropriate help if alternative support can be identified. This applies to students who, for example, may be at risk through self-harm or harm to others, or those whose personal crises circumstances are beyond the guidance counsellor's level of competence.

Guidance counsellors should be realistic about their own level of competence when assessing students for online support. Some students experiencing severe mental health issues, including psychosis, trauma or severe personality disorders should be informed to access alternative appropriate professional support. Schools need to continue to adhere to their usual policies and practices regarding referral to external agencies; this applies in the 'online school' just as it does when schools are operating as normal.

2.2 Parental and Student Consent

For the provision of 1-1 guidance counselling and school supports, and with regard to the age and capacity to give informed consent to participate in such 1-1 supports, the onus is on school personnel to make reasonable efforts to verify them. Ideally, parents need to be made aware where students under 18 have access to online 1:1 guidance counselling, support or 1:1 teaching[1]. ***See footnote for more detailed explanation regarding consent and data protection.***

School management will need to inform all parents that online 1:1 support is available. The preferred school communication system (i.e. text, email, letter or other system) can be used to inform parents how guidance counsellors and teachers will communicate with students online in order to provide 1:1 support. Students must also be made aware that they have the option to opt out from 1-1 guidance counselling support at any stage. Clear instructions should be given to students as to how to do this.

Given the confidential nature of these discussions, the school management, in conjunction with the guidance counsellor, should make every effort to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place to protect the security, confidentiality and privacy of these 1-1 sessions.

[1]As the school is ultimately the Data Controller, school managers are free to seek individual parental consent for accessing 1-1 online supports, but it is not a pre-requisite. The Irish Data Protection Act (2018) requires prior parental consent for children under 16 years of age to avail of 'information society services' (e.g. online communications accounts, e-mail or online services), however, there is a specific exemption where the child is seeking preventative or counselling services: "Section 31: (1) The age of a child specified for the purposes of Article 8 [the requirement for prior parental consent] is 16 years of age. (2) For the purposes of the application of Article 8 in the (Irish) State, the reference in that Article to "information society services" does not include a reference to preventative or counselling services." For this reason, where the student is availing of *online guidance counselling services*, the prior consent of their parent(s) is not necessary.

Continuity of Guidance Counselling – Guidelines for Schools April 2020

2.3 Establishing an online contract

Prospective online students need to have certain details, including pre-session information and contractual issues, and this should be available on the guidance counsellor/school's website. In addition, this information should be replicated via email once communication between student and guidance counsellor is established.

Students may quickly scan initial details, including terms and conditions, on a website without actually absorbing all the details, thus the importance of repeating them. To avoid misunderstanding, the language used to convey this information should be clear and unambiguous. The establishment of an online contract can help to reduce the potential for misunderstanding or disagreement between student and guidance counsellor and can serve as a useful reference point if conflict or misunderstanding arises during the course of support.

Steps should be taken during preliminary discussions to ensure that information gained from students is equivalent to that obtained in face to face work with students. Psychometric and other guidance-related assessments may be conducted via online questionnaire or via personal communication or both.

2.4 Contract information

The contract, which sets an agreement between student and guidance counsellor, is the foundation of the relationship. It provides information for the student who will then know what to expect. It also establishes the boundaries of the support relationship and is designed to ensure that the student understands how the guidance counsellor is going to work. Personal phone numbers should not be shared by the guidance counsellor. School mobile phone numbers and email addresses can be shared.

School-based email addresses should be used where possible. In the case where students do not have school-based email addresses, the use of personal email addresses should be discussed with school management. If deemed appropriate, the use of personal emails needs to be approved by parents/ guardians of the student. School management should develop robust guidelines which indicate appropriate use and boundaries regarding the use of personal emails.

The following are specific aspects to consider when working online:

- Information about how you work online. Is this done synchronously or asynchronously? Is it done via email, telephone or visual platform?

- Details about session booking, dates and times of contact, as well as times of response from guidance counsellor to student. The amount of time per session. Will support be provided during the normal school day and follow the usual timetable/schedule?

- Details of security for confidentiality

- The student's responsibility in relation to electronically stored or printed material either sent to or received from the guidance counsellor

- The ethical framework or code of ethics that you adhere to

- What can realistically be expected by the student and what may be achievable

- What should happen in the event of technology failure or an emergency, and what are the alternative means of contact?

- What are the arrangements for you or the student if either becomes ill?

- The difference between communication used for making practical arrangements, and the content material of support sessions. For example, using a mobile phone to confirm or cancel appointments, but not for personal or confidential communication

- Policy about sending or accepting email attachments and the use of technological resources including blogging and public forums

- General referral procedures and procedures in the event of emergency or crisis and the additional help available in emergency or crisis

- Consideration of where the support is actually taking place and the applicable law relating to this.

3. Other issues specific to working online including handling crisis situations and child protection concerns

3.1 Specific online barriers to effective communication

Working with students via email means that verbal and visual cues are absent, a fact that guidance counsellors using this medium need to remind themselves of in their contact with students.

Telephone guidance counselling has similar limitations in the sense that non-verbal and visual cues are compromised. This limitation means that highly developed listening skills are essential prerequisites for guidance counsellors working with this form of distance guidance counselling.

Guidance counsellors need to understand what verbal pauses or changes in voice tone might mean, for example. These considerations become even more relevant in the context of student difference and diversity.

3.2 Crisis situations and student safety

Student safety is of paramount importance in the context of online support, and guidance counsellors should address this from the outset by including crisis referral details on their school website or homepage.

There are a number of organisations dedicated to helping members of the public in crisis, including the Samaritans and Pieta House. The **HSE.ie** also provides a list of out of hours doctors services nationally, who are available to help in a crisis.

https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/gp/out-of-hours-services/

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides support to schools and have developed advice and resources to support young people to manage and stay well while schools are closed.

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Home-Page.html

Following normal school procedures, it is the guidance counsellor's responsibility to refer students to other suitably qualified professionals when it is appropriate to do so. This duty of care applies equally to online work with students, and guidance counsellors working online need to have sufficient training in this medium to ascertain if a student in crisis needs medical treatment, hospital admission or even Garda/Police intervention. Students who request online support should be given prior information about procedures in place in the event of a crisis, along with details about situations in which these may be needed.

3.3 Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017

Child Protection Procedures for Schools

The Department of Education and Skills circular 0081/2017 (published on 11 December, 2017) informs school management authorities that the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017 have been developed and published following an extensive consultation with the education partners.

The purpose of the procedures is to give clear direction and guidance to school authorities and to school personnel in relation to meeting the statutory obligations under the Children First Act, 2015 and in the continued implementation within the school setting of the best practice guidance set out in the updated Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017.

The procedures apply to all recognised primary and post-primary schools and to all members of school personnel.

Reporting to TUSLA (Child and Family Agency) using the Tusla Portal:

Since the Child Protection Procedures for Schools were published, Tusla has developed and put in place a secure online Portal for reporting child protection concerns. This Portal now also allows the reporter to print a copy of the report submitted. Accordingly, when reporting a concern to TUSLA under these Procedures, the Tusla Portal should be used wherever possible.

After the report has been submitted via the Tusla Portal, a copy of the report must be printed and retained in accordance with the requirements of the Procedures.

Further information in relation to the use of the portal is available at: https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/web-portal/

Supporting documents/templates (14 in total) are available for schools to use in implementing the Child Protection Procedures. School management, where practicable, should conduct a risk assessment in advance of the provision of online 1:1 guidance counselling.

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Child-Protection/child_protection_guidelines.pdf

3.4 Guidance counsellor responsibility for safeguarding personal information

Along with social networking sites and blogs, the internet encompasses a myriad of possibilities for access to personal profiles and the information they contain. Guidance counsellors, therefore, need to be aware that actual and potential students have access to public profiles and the information which is held on these websites.

Guidance counsellors should also consider the fact that they do not have control over personal information written about them. Some of this may relate to their personal as well as professional lives and can be accessed by anyone sufficiently interested to do so. Those seeking information may include students and other professionals including colleagues. Bearing these facts in mind, guidance counsellors should ensure that all personal information, accessible to the public, is strictly professional and does not discredit either guidance counsellor or the teaching profession. To maintain a responsible online presence implies having policies in place to deal with, for example, student requests for association through networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. Policies are also indicated to deal with other situations including the following:

- A student who blogs about the guidance counsellor and details of the sessions

- A Student makes remarks or commentary on the guidance counsellor's blog

- A student posting disparaging remarks about the guidance counsellor

- A student uses texting in inappropriate ways, regardless of boundaries or contract. This is not to question the usefulness of texting in certain contexts, for example arranging or cancelling appointments.

3.5 Threats to security

Threats to security typically arise from using the wrong type of hardware or software, technological failures, the behaviour of people involved, or unauthorised intrusion by third parties. Sources of threat may include[2]

Physical Intrusion at either end of the communication, for example by being overheard or someone being present without the knowledge and consent of the person at the other end of the communication. Physical security needs to extend beyond the actual sessions by ensuring that the means of communication are adequately protected and not left open for others to view current transactions or to search for the history of communications. Guidance counsellors are directly responsible for protecting their end of the communications.

Good practice safeguards against physical intrusion include vigilance about being overheard or overseen, adequate password protection and encryption of data to prevent intrusion on equipment and software used, and by providing information to students about how best to protect their security.

Electronic Intrusion by third parties typically arises because of:

- using insecure methods of communication including unprotected Wi-Fi
- inadequate firewalls and virus protection being used at either end of the communication
- security systems being bypassed by third parties, possibly by the use of spyware or code breakers, which may be readily available on the internet

Good practice safeguards against intrusion by third parties include:
Adequate password protection and encryption of services being provided, regularly updating firewalls, virus protection or other applicable security systems and providing suitable information to service users to enable them to protect their end of the communications.

Electronic Intrusion by the online communication provider is to some degree unavoidable when using any of the platforms or applications that make online communications possible. However, there is a wide variation in how far providers of online and digital services intrude on the communications they transmit, claim ownership of what is communicated and the degree to which they protect the privacy of the communications they facilitate.

Good practice safeguards against electronic intrusion by the online communication provider include:

- using providers and electronic platforms that meet the privacy and quality standards especially when working with personally sensitive information
- carefully checking the provider's contractual terms and conditions to ensure that they are suitable for the type of service being provided
- offering more secure alternatives to students where this is practicable
- keeping up to date with new developments to enhance the privacy, security and reliability of your chosen method of communication

[2]Extract from: Good Practice in Action 047 Fact Sheet: Working Online in the Counselling Professions published by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Continuity of Guidance Counselling – Guidelines for Schools April 2020

Good practice safeguards against electronic intrusion by the online communication provider include:

- using providers and electronic platforms that meet the privacy and quality standards especially when working with personally sensitive information
- carefully checking the provider's contractual terms and conditions to ensure that they are suitable for the type of service being provided
- offering more secure alternatives to students where this is practicable
- keeping up to date with new developments to enhance the privacy, security and reliability of your chosen method of communication.

4. Interjurisdictional Practice: Professional codes and laws

4.1 Appropriate standards of practice for students who return to counties and countries outside the Republic of Ireland

Students do not always live within the same geographical area as the guidance counsellor. Some students (and teachers) are not resident in the Republic of Ireland and may cross the EU border to attend school, while other students are normally resident in another country but may be attending boarding schools in Ireland. These students may now be accessing the school remotely from a different jurisdiction.

Regardless of location, guidance counsellors should abide by and uphold the standard of practice required by their own professional organisation.

In addition, students who live outside a guidance counsellor's jurisdiction should be made aware of these standards and codes of practice. Guidance counsellors should review and understand the requirements and relevant laws of the specific jurisdiction in which they wish to provide online support for students.

Section 2 points to details which students should have within a contract and includes consideration of where the support is actually taking place and the applicable law relating to this. There may be a difference of opinion as to whether it is at the point of delivery or at the point of supply.

Moreover, some jurisdictions stipulate that online support is not legal unless both student and guidance counsellor are physically present within state boundaries. As there are differences in requirements for online support, guidance counsellors need to be constantly aware of any relevant laws and regulations specific to different areas. Additionally, guidance counsellors should make sure they comply with the requirements or legal stipulations in areas outside their own jurisdiction where they plan to work. This will entail some research into applicable laws and may even require (in some instances) legal advice for added security. School managers should review the situation as it pertains to their school and advise their staff and students accordingly.

4.2 Professional indemnity insurance

School managers need to check that the school's professional indemnity insurance covers staff who wish to work online through distance 1:1 support provision, and that it extends to coverage of relevant jurisdictions and the laws which apply in these.

Not all insurance agencies which offer insurance for face to face support are willing to extend insurance to online practice, which means that guidance counsellors should clarify this with the school management before embarking on this type of practice. Many insurers will stipulate certain security conditions that should be met before insurance for online work with students is granted. It is worth stating that guidance counsellors and other teachers who engage in distance support as part of their practice should understand that they may be subject to regulations and laws in the student's jurisdiction as well as their own.

5.   GDPR - Confidentiality in relation to data protection and storage

5.1 Risks and possible infringement

Guidance counsellors who provide online guidance counselling services for students, for individuals or groups, must protect and maintain confidentiality, especially in relation to the data and information relating to them. This is an ethical requirement in every model of support, it is especially significant in online work. This mode of delivery is particularly vulnerable to breaches of confidentiality. Maintaining the protection needed pre-supposes that guidance counsellors are well informed about the potential risks to confidentiality before using online technology.

Guidance counsellors can only acquire this knowledge through prior training. Further information about data protection can be obtained through consultation with technology and data protection experts in this field. See the various links for more information.

Potential risks to confidentiality may occur during use of search engines and participation in social networking sites. Guidance counsellors must be aware that any information on the internet can be intercepted by a third party at any time or by someone (including a relative) with access to their personal computer.

Guidance counsellors must inform their students about the limits of confidentiality, including the risk of possible access to, or disclosure of, confidential information which can occur during service delivery. Included here is the risk of access to telephone calls or email when the guidance counsellor and student are communicating via either of these mediums.

Online supervision is another area vulnerable to loss of confidentiality when data and stored information is not adequately protected. Guidance counsellors should be aware of Irish law on data protection: this is included in the European Union-wide framework known as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which came into force across the EU on 25 May 2018.

NCGE has developed guidelines and a webinar dealing with *Data Protection for the Guidance Counsellor (GDPR)* which includes compliance with data protection legislation.

https://www.ncge.ie/covid-19/support/post-primary/resources

5.2 Confidentiality and security safeguards

Guidance counsellors working online need to consider how best to work securely so that confidentiality is not compromised. Online student confidentiality is just as important as it is in face to face consultations with students. Online students who are at risk, or those in crisis situations, are covered by the same guidelines as those in face to face support.

Guidance counsellors must inform their students about the possibility of disclosure in certain situations, when working with them online. Students should also be informed and consulted if case material is used in supervision or research. Several other important points arise in relation to student confidentiality and online data, including the following:

- Guidance counsellors must maintain electronic and paper records in accordance with normal school policy

- Students should be informed about the way records are stored and protected electronically

- Guidance counsellors should assess if a student is aware of any third party who might wish to intercept their communication, and arrange for referral if necessary

- Students should be asked about their computer access and warned that security may be compromised if using a work, library or cybercafé computer

- Encryption and other security measures should be assigned to records where possible

- Password protection should be in place and changed regularly so that access to confidential electronic messages is protected. Especially important is the use of password protection for opening email attachments and access to folders and documents held on a computer and online systems

- Guidance counsellors who are in doubt about specific security issues should seek relevant professional help on devising and maintaining online systems which are required for student confidentiality

- Schools have specific systems in place for holding and protecting student data. Guidance counsellors who are employed by schools should comply with the specific requirements dictated by their school.

- Websites should include policy detail about the security measures in place, and any circumstances in which data could be shared or disclosed.

- Guidance counsellors should regularly check that electronic links are working and are appropriate for professional use

- All confidential printed material, including emails and student information should be safely stored in line with security measures for student face to face notes

NCGE provides online resources to support guidance counsellors and schools with sample Record Templates for Guidance Counselling One-to-One Meetings with Students, for education, career and personal guidance 1:1 sessions

https://www.ncge.ie/covid-19/support/post-primary/resources

Conclusion

In order to be fully informed about the importance of maintaining student confidentiality, guidance counsellors should be aware of any wider implications which impinge on their work, especially in relation to the possibility of outside access to student information.

The Freedom of Information Act 2014 requires the Health Service Executive (HSE) and other public bodies to publish certain information on their activities, and to make the information they hold, including personal information, available to citizens.

Legal obligations on guidance counsellors to submit to a court of law, transcripts of their communication with students, in circumstances as required by law, must be taken into consideration in online support as they would in more conventional methods of support.

These considerations mean that online guidance counsellors must take special care and exercise vigilance when using distance technology to work with students. This extra vigilance is especially important when storing and maintaining confidential student information.

References and useful links

These guidelines were adapted and extracts taken from the IACP guidelines - *IACP Recommended Approach for Online Counselling and Psychotherapy* Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Extracts from: Good Practice in Action 047 Fact Sheet: *Working Online in the Counselling Professions* published by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy,

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

Evans, J. (2009). Online Counselling and Guidance Skills: A Practical Resource for Trainees and Guidance counsellors. London: Sage Publications.

International Society for Mental Health Online (2014) Available at: www. ismho.org

Institute of Guidance Counsellors Code of Ethics - http://www.igc.ie/

Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. (2014). Code of Ethics and Practice for Counsellors/Psychotherapists. Dublin: IACP.

NEPS - https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational- Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Home-Page.html

HSE - urgent help in a crisis - https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health- services/connecting-for-life/urgent-help/

https://www2.hse.ie/services/mental-health/services-search/

NCGE - NCGE Support Information for Guidance Counsellors in Schools, APRIL 2020, (Covid-19 School Closures 2020) -   https://www.ncge.ie/covid-19/support

Monaghan Info for Supervisors - https://www.ncge.ie/covid-19/support/post-primary/resources/supervision

CareersPortal https://careersportal.ie/

Solas | Learning Works https://www.solas.ie/

Qualifax https://www.qualifax.ie/