I have recently undertaking training in Online Counselling and am now very pleased and excited to be offering this as an option to clients who cannot, or do not wish to, attend face-to-face counselling.

Online Counselling is where the client and the therapist develop a therapeutic relationship online, rather than in person. It can take the form of telephone counselling sessions, video-conferencing using free software such as Zoom, or even counselling via the exchange of texts or emails. Security features of Zoom and encrypted emails ensure confidentiality and peace of mind.

Online Counselling gives the client greater flexibility around how and when therapy is delivered, removes the need to travel to the therapist’s premises, which can be problematic for some clients, and allows clients to have therapy in the comfort and familiar surroundings of their own home. Clients often find Online Counselling less daunting or intimidating than face-to-face counselling and are therefore more able to open up to their therapist. Some prefer using the written word over talking about their issues. Counsellors trained in online therapy, denied the intimacy or visual cues available in face-to-face work, learn to be more attentive using the non-visual senses available to them.

Online Counselling may be able to help with a wide range of issues including anxiety, stress, depression, eating difficulties, isolation and loneliness, relationship problems, bereavement, self-esteem, confidence, anger, sexual orientation, discrimination and many more. There are, of course, some client presentations that are not suitable for online work. These include clients with suicidal presentations, clients with an active substance misuse, clients suffering from acute trauma or PTSD, clients experiencing abuse, and some other more complex presentations.

Some clients may not have access to appropriate technology or be less comfortable than others with using it. They may suffer from dyslexia, learning difficulties or sight, speech or hearing impairments, in which case face-to-face sessions might be more appropriate (where social distancing restrictions allow). Suitability for Online Counselling is something we would discuss during our initial consultation. In some cases, I may recommend face-to-face counselling or make a referral to a more appropriate service provider or practitioner.

**ABOUT THE WAY I WORK ONLINE**

I will provide, to the best of my ability, Online Counselling opportunities that endeavour to create a supportive, non-judgmental environment in which you will be given time and space to understand and gain insight into your situation. This process can foster growth and lead to positive change in your life. I will not be in a position to offer advice.

Online Counselling is different to face-to-face work as misunderstandings may occur due to a lack of facial expressions and tone of voice. We should agree to think the best of each other and then try to express how we are feeling. In the event of a misunderstanding arising for either party, it is advisable that we seek to clarify the cause of any miscommunication. To this end, clients may find that I ask more questions than I might during face-to-face work. This is in order to seek a clearer view of your difficulty or to clarify a misunderstanding in our communication.

You may find that I am paying more attention to your tone of voice, the inflections in your speech, how you pace your dialogue, how you use silence, your breathing, than I might during face-to-face counselling, especially if we are talking on the phone rather than using video. I might be more deliberate in how I speak, use more precise language, I might emphasise or describe any non-verbal cues that I am using. Please do not be intimidated or put off by any of this – this is how Online Counsellors are trained to compensate for the lack of, or reduced amount of, visual cues that are so useful in face-to-face counselling.

You might find that you have less inhibitions during Online Counselling than in face-to-face work, which might lead you to disclosing more than you are comfortable with or disclosing sensitive material earlier in the relationship than you might want to. This is perfectly natural, and Online Counsellors are trained to deal with this. I will always treat everything you say in confidence and with empathy and respect.

The body of research evidence, although limited at present, suggests that Online Counselling can be at least as effective as face-to-face counselling for working with a wide range of client presentations, and I look forward to working with my clients in the most effective way for their own particular circumstances.

**WHAT DOES THE SERVICE OFFER?**

* **Counselling by email or text.** Shine Counselling does not currently offer counselling via email or text. I may contact you by email or text between sessions, for example to arrange or reschedule appointments. I will use encrypted email (Tutanota) if any sensitive information is exchanged.
* **Counselling by telephone.** I willcall you at the appointed time and we will talk on the phonefor the duration of the session, which is usually 1 hour. I will call from a private room free of interruptions and disable any other phone functionality so that we are not distracted. I will never record our sessions, and trust that you won’t either. I will use a headset and microphone so that there is no possibility of you being overheard by anyone else (and, of course, the room is private) and so that I can hear you more clearly. Ideally you will be able to do the same, although this is not essential. Should we be cut off during the session, I will call you back and attempt to reconnect. Should this not be possible, I will rearrange the remainder of the session for another time.
* **Video counselling**.If you would prefer ‘live’ online video counselling appointments, we would use free software called Zoom, which many clients will already be familiar with from using it during lockdown for online meetings or family catch-ups. You would need to download this software if you don’t already have it. I will email you with a hyperlink and a password to a Zoom session for the appointed time, which again is usually 1 hour. The link is only valid for use by the two of us for the duration of our session, so that nobody else can accidentally enter the session. When you join the zoom session, your video camera will be turned off and your microphone will be muted: it is your choice if and when to enable video and/or audio. Everything that applies to phone counselling around privacy, recording and use of headsets also applies to video counselling. Should we be cut off during the Zoom session, I will, in the first instance, attempt to re-establish the Zoom meeting. If I am unable to do so, I will call you back and attempt to complete the session by phone. Should this not be possible, I will rearrange the remainder of the session for another time.

**DISCLAIMER**

Every reasonable precaution is taken to ensure a client's privacy online, as per GDPR and current legislation, using password protection for meetings and secure software platforms. However, clients should be aware that due to use of third-party software, it is never possible to be 100% secure. Clients will always be informed at the earliest opportunity of any data breeches, security concerns regarding third-party software used, or changes to relevant legislation.