

IACAT COVID-19 RETURN-TO-WORK GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS

Valid as of 22nd May 2020

Introduction

Creative Arts Psychotherapists can be considered part of Social Care, which is an essential service provided Government and NPHET protocols and guidance on social distancing are followed. The decision to meet clients face-to-face or through remote means is solely at the judgement of the individual therapist.

The challenges posed by Covid-19 mean that significant planning will be required to move towards a new mode of operating. It is the responsibility of employers and self-employed persons to apply a risk-based approach to returning to work and prepare to apply the precautions necessary to fully comply with the public health advice.

This document is intended to consolidate practical guidance that is available at the time of writing on how to manage business continuity for all CAT therapists during the COVID-19 pandemic. It addresses risks to both therapists and the public drawing from documents already published. Please refer to references page.

This guide will assist therapists to implement the Return to Work Safely Protocol for employers and workers, which applies to all workplaces right across the economy. It is recommended to review the Return to Work Safely Protocol on a regular basis, which is available under:

<https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>

This guide incorporates current advice about measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the community issued by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET), therefore it should be noted that this is a living document, recommendations are non-exhaustive and are subject to change. The document is divided into four sections:

Section 1 – Covid 19 Response Plan

Section 2 – Returning to Work

Section 3 – Guidelines for Clients and Therapists working face to face

Section 4 - Appendix

Section 1

All IACAT Members who are working and considering re-opening their face-to-face practice must develop and/or update a COVID-19 Response Plan.

The Covid19 Response Plan must include:

- a safety statement
- an occupational Health and Safety risk statement.
- a staff induction and training programme(s), where more than one therapist is employed
- consideration of each employee/therapist's individual risk factors (e.g. age, presence of underlying medical conditions, etc.).
- a response plan to deal with a suspected case of COVID-19.
- controls necessary to address the risks identified.
- contingency measures to address increased rates of worker absenteeism, implementation of the measures necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19, changing work patterns, etc.
- consultation with workers re the Response Plan and how this is communicated to workers once finalised.

The new Standard Operating Procedures for a practice should include:

- Protocols for practice staff (if applicable).
- Protocols for the management of clients in the practice.
- Hygiene and health protocols.
- Cleaning and disinfection protocols.

The Standard Operating Procedures must be developed around staff operations and the client journey. It will be individual to each practice and informed by the pertaining circumstances including location, staffing, layout, and equipment.

Section 2 - Returning to Work

Before returning to work, the following pre-return to work steps should be put in place and completed by employers:

Prior to therapists returning to work, a *return to work* form should be completed at least 3 days in advance of their return to work. This form should seek confirmation that the worker, to the best of their knowledge, has no symptoms of COVID-19 and confirm that the worker is not self-isolating or awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test.

Please find a link to the template at the end of this document.

- Provide an induction training for all workers (details of the training are provided in the *Return to Work Safety Protocol*).
- Arrange for the putting in place of the necessary controls identified in the risk assessment to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Implement temperature testing in line with Public Health advice (on 13th May 2020 IBEC confirmed that the only workplaces that require temperature testing are Residential Care Homes).

To assist with the return to work, employers can find details of existing supports and resources in place for businesses impacted by COVID-19 at:

<https://dbe.gov.ie/en/Publications/Supports-for-businesses-COVID-19.html>

As per The Return to Work Safely Protocol, COVID-19 Prevention & Control measures for workers should include:

- COVID-19 “*pre-return to work form*” to be signed by all employees 3 days prior to returning to work.
- Staff are required to participate in induction training.
- Staff training must include appropriate use of: PPE, hand hygiene, practice hygiene, cleaning routines, waste disposal, Respiratory etiquette, signs and symptoms of COVID 19, how it spreads and what a worker should do if they develop symptoms of COVID-19.
- Further details of how the workplace is organised to address the risk from COVID-19 should be included in the Occupational Health and Safety Risk statement.
- Implementation of temperature testing in line with public health advice.

- Mandatory self-reporting of symptoms.
- Recording names and times when staff enter and leave the premises each day.
- Maintain social distance and avoid physical contact.
- Use of PPE or barrier when less than 2m from any individual or for over 15 minutes with any individual.
- Staff should be protected by physical barriers/screens where 2m distance cannot be maintained, or the use of PPE is not practical (at reception, dispensing area, till points).
- Staff displaying COVID-19 symptoms should be isolated, returned home to seek medical advice and not use public transport. The practice is required to provide an area for staff and clients to isolate when suspected of having COVID-19. Follow the HSE and Back to Work Safely guidance on how COVID-19 suspects should be managed in order to develop your practice policy.
- Considerations must be included to how staff who are vulnerable will manage their role in the practice.
- It is mandatory that all staff are protected and feel safe in their role.
- Other considerations for the management of staff include taking breaks, access to hand washing facilities, access to disinfection gel, use of toilet, and canteen facilities within the practice.
- Staff must be provided with PPE according to their level of risk.
- Risk levels may differ according to the role in the practice.
- PPE includes items such as face masks, face shields, and gloves. Surgical masks should be worn where a distance of 2 m cannot be maintained.

Please note that members operating a private practice and are not employing any staff must personally adhere to the above pre-return to work preparations.

Section 3

GUIDELINES AROUND CLIENTS & THERAPISTS FACE TO FACE WORKING:

When travelling to and from the practice where you work, ensure you have an email/letter from your employer stating that you are providing an essential service. If you are self-employed, please write a letter in your own name declaring the provision of an essential service as a reason for travel.

NOTE:

Some Therapy Centres may have specific requirements around PPE and procedures for the arrival and departure of clients in and out of the centre. Please adhere these as stipulated.

Client/ Therapist Safety re Covid-19 If you intend to engage creatively in sessions with your client/s, consideration should be given to how you maintain a low risk of any Covid-19 transmission between the client and therapist and between clients who will be using the same space.

The three Core components of Government guidelines on Covid-19 –

1. Sanitise hands
2. Practice cough and sneeze hygiene
3. Maintain social distancing

Masks:

Advice on mask wearing appears to suggest that it can help protect the infected person from spreading it to other people particularly when sharing the same space for an extended period of conversation. If, you or your client are comfortable with it, you can choose to wear a face mask as added protection.

Therapy - Reception/waiting room (if applicable)

- Methodology to control traffic in and out of the practice, in line with your practice safety policy.
- Regular cleaning and disinfection of all areas contacted by clients (surfaces, furniture etc.).
- Floor markings at reception indicating 2m social distance.

- Separate seating to maintain required social distance.
- Hand sanitizer must be provided at entry and exit.
- Ensure all non-essential items are removed from the waiting room and practice.
- Place appropriate signage at the entrance to the practice.

Therapy rooms:

Consider using a larger room if one is available

It is advisable that windows are opened and kept open in each therapy room for the duration of each session as well-ventilated spaces are safer.

Schedule a period of 15 minutes between clients to allow time for airborne droplets to settle.

Take a moment to wipe down any wipeable surfaces chair surfaces, tables, tissue boxes and anything that either they or you might touch before each client arrives. (Keep packets of wipes in every room)

In rooms with cloth upholstery please use couch paper and dispose of at end of each session. Consider using hard chairs with wipeable surfaces instead

Please remember to use hand sanitiser before and after using light switches, opening/closing windows etc.

Making an appointment

- When arranging an appointment, it is important to explain to the client what will happen and how (this may be different than when they attended in the past) and conduct a COVID-19 pre-screening.
- Provide patients with a confirmation email, or an appointment letter, that they can carry with them when travelling to and from their appointment.

Client arrival and exit

- Remember that both the bell and intercom are a possible infection point. Suggest to client that they use a pen or key to press bell push.
- Ask the client to arrive on time and if they drive to the centre, request that they remain in their car prior to their appointment and you will call them to enter when it is safe to do so. Ensure that you notify them of this prior to appointment.

- Clients can be met at the door and escorted to wash their hands (if no wash hand basin in the therapy room) and then to the therapeutic room.
- The therapy room is to be arranged so that there is at least 2 metres distance between the client and therapist.
- The client is required to use Hand sanitiser.
- Reconfirm COVID-19 risk assessment with the client.
- Refrain from offering water or using glassware from kitchen and if client brings their own, ask them to take their bottle with them and dispose of it in the bin outside when they are leaving. Ask client to be mindful of how they dispose of tissues, masks etc.
- When your client is leaving, please check that the corridor is clear and then show them out.
- At the end of the session, clients can be brought to wash their hands (if no wash hand basin in the therapy room) and then to the exit.
- When using the WC closing the Lid before flushing appears to help reduce risk of aerosolising in confined spaces.
- Assure sufficient time between appointments in order to avoid any overlap and allow time for infection control procedures.

Vulnerable clients

Consideration should be given to clients in a vulnerable group (older, immunocompromised or unwell) and if a face-to-face option is in their interest.

Clients should not attend face-to-face session if:

- The client has developed even mild symptoms or has been diagnosed with COVID-19.
- The client had first-hand contact with an individual who is diagnosed with COVID-19 or has even mild symptoms of COVID-19.
- The client has been advised to self-isolate (for example: if they just arrived in the country).

Therapy room

- Hand hygiene of client is essential; advise client to wash hands/use hand sanitiser.

- You may consider offering the client the use of a mask to provide further protection or advise them to bring their own mask.
- Therapist must use appropriate PPE and observe hand hygiene.
- Room(s) is(are) to be cleaned/disinfected between clients
- Use good hygiene practices, washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially before and after each client.
- Practice 'social distancing', but perhaps explain the need for it and/or call it 'physical distance' (currently 2 metres)
- Most centres will have a form that to be filled in by the client on their arrival. It is perfectly reasonable and acceptable to ask clients who have travelled recently and/or have symptoms to make a new appointment in 14 days' time
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces with detergent and disinfectant wipe/solution between each client in the therapeutic room and the route to the exit.
- Take care to clean/disinfect surfaces in areas that clients have been directly in contact with or may have been exposed to respiratory droplets.
- Perform routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces with detergent/disinfectant solution/wipe at least daily.
- Floors should be cleaned using a detergent solution.
- Minimise close contact as much as possible.

Materials and equipment for all CATS

- It may well be useful, during this period of the Covid - 9 challenge, to reduce the range of materials that are on offer so that both the risk and the time spent cleaning materials/ utensils/ instruments/toys/props etc is reduced and kept to a practical level.
- Materials such as clay and sand that is used generally by more than one client should not be used. If you were to use sand or clay, consider it "single use only" and dispose of it at the end of the session.
- Materials such as pencils, pens, paintbrushes, scissors, non-fabric props & toys and instruments(that can be easily disinfected) can be stored in bags

(e.g. labelled Ziplock bags or boxes depending on CAT modality equipment) and assigned to each client.

- All other equipment and materials such as paper, textiles as well as cushions and rugs which can be single use and washed afterwards at 60 degrees, can be handed out by the therapist so that the client does not come into contact with all of the materials and or equipment. This can be sensitively discussed and incorporated in your new contract so that the client clearly understands the reasoning behind this procedure.
- At the end of the session the client wipes down all the materials and equipment they have used with disinfectant and replaces them back into their designated bag/box

Or/

- The client chooses materials for use during the session – fresh gloves must be used
- At the end of the session the used materials are placed in a clearly marked container for all used materials situated away from the sanitised materials. These can be sanitised at the end of the day.
- For wet materials used in any modality, it is advised to only use these if you have access to a sink in your therapy room.
- Disposable materials can be used, but it advised to be aware of our impact on the environment by creating more waste than is necessary
- The disposal of materials may be necessary during and at the end of the session, so adequate facilities need to be arranged to do this e.g. designated refuse bags etc. It is also important for you to know that you will and do have access to appropriate hygiene materials and equipment prior to the start of any session. Sessions should not be undertaken where the appropriate safety materials are not available. If there are issues these should be discussed with your manager or the individual responsible for the work place you are working in. It may be useful to discuss with staff/ support
- Again, all surfaces including materials and door handles etc must be sanitised after each session. Please make sure you allow enough time to clean and the sanitise the space before the next client.
- If the client urgently needs to use the bathroom. Please ensure they are advised of the bathroom etiquette. Placing down the toilette lid before flushing to prevent the spread of bacteria. Wiping down all surfaces when

they have finished before washing their hands and using the disposable hand towels.

Storage

- All Creative Arts Therapists should also be conscientious of any materials and equipment that are traveling in and out of the art/music/drama/dance studio or space. For example, materials and client work can be kept in the room but if the client takes it with them, it should not be returned to the therapy room. If working from an art cart, consider only taking in what you need for the session and leaving the rest outside.
- Some therapy centres may now have a reduced storage capacity due to the level of sanitisation required in order to reduce possible contamination therefore therapists may wish to assign a small amount of materials and/or equipment for each client.
- For the storage of any work produced by the client, the therapist may choose to store client work themselves in a secured storage unit. Or the therapist can discuss a safe place for the client to store their work at their home. If client work leaves the therapeutic space it cannot be brought back into the space.
- Whichever method of materials, equipment, client work, creative work storage and equipment needs should be agreed and included in the new contract for the Covid-19 period.

Payment

- It is advised to use contactless payment such as Revolute and other online payments
- It is advised to take payment before the session in the same manner as online sessions

We wish all CAT's well during this period of change and welcome your suggestions as we settle into this new way of working and fine tune our approach to health and safety within our working spaces.

Section 4 - APPENDIX:

Additional resources:

Art Therapy:

<https://arttherapy.org/blog-best-practices-using-art-supplies-during-covid-19-outbreak/>

Return to Work Safely protocol

<https://dbe.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/safetywellbeing/healthsafetyand%20wellbeing/safetystatementsandriskassessments.html>

The Wheel

<https://www.wheel.ie/blog/2020/05/practical-considerations-returning-work-safely>

Posters and info HSE

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

WHO online course

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/training/online-training>

https://www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/covid19/return_to_work_safely_templates_and_checklists/return_to_work_safely_templates_and_checklists.html

Coronavirus (COVID-19) posters and resources

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

UKCP Coronavirus Hub which includes links to advice on working in-person, and links to a webinar on working remotely and a podcast on the role of psychotherapy in relation to coronavirus.

<https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/ukcp-news/coronavirus-hub/#>