E-Social work guidelines

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

This document uses the term “client”. This term is used to cover individual clients, whānau, groups of people and communities who work with social workers, services and organisations. It is not used to mean only a single individual.

Technology is opening up a number of new options for social work interventions. This document is intended to provide guidance for social workers who are providing services when kanohi ki kanohi is not the primary interface.

Social work has, at its core, the development of relationships. These relationships form an interconnected network between social workers, clients, families, communities, services, employers, governments, society – linking all parts of humanity. Once the relationships are formed, social workers facilitate and support the development of services which meet the requirements of the communities they occur within.

Social workers were early users of telephone technology to connect with the clients of their services. Other services are now available, and more and more often, social workers are making use of video conferencing to reach service users, service providers, funders, and to continue to build those networks of relationships that can also be built face to face. Social workers may also use text and app-based systems to support the wellbeing of their clients.

At all times social workers must comply with the SWRB Code of Conduct and ANZASW Code of Ethics. Where or how we work does not impact on our core values and behaviours.

Social workers engaging in e-social work should gain information and support on the resources available; education and ongoing supervision in the use of remote social work; and keep up to date with knowledge of privacy, confidentiality and consent.

ANZASW Indemnity Insurance covers remote practice.

Setting up.
Platform and programmes.

- Ensure that the platform you are using is secure.
- Secure platforms: Zoom (IMPORTANT: ensure you follow Zoom’s instructions to maintain security), Doxy.me, Clocktree (put your IRD number in the tax verification box), iCouch, Thera-link, VSee and Microsoft teams are all currently considered to be secure.
- Platforms that should NOT be used: Most consumer social media messaging apps including (but not limited to) FaceTime, WhatsApp, Messenger, Snapchat and Skype should not be used. These apps generally have end-to-end encryption, but user data may be harvested and used in various algorithms.
- For text / written communication use email or standard text messages.
- Do not use your personal email address.
- Either use a work email address or create an address for client / business use.
- Do not use Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp. These are not secure. Both can be remotely accessed and monitored and can be mined for metadata and targeted advertising.
Facebook and WhatsApp are used as an informal platform and may make it hard to maintain a professional tone and boundaries.

In some situations you may need to provide instructions to your client by phone, so they are comfortable using a video programme. Familiarise yourself with the programme so that you can show them how to set up their microphone and video camera, including adjusting audio settings; change their view etc.

**Equipment**

- When hosting a video meeting with a client (or your network members, colleagues etc) using a desktop with a camera or a laptop with a built-in camera or a tablet on a stand is recommended.
- If you must use a phone, put it in a stand or prop it on a hard surface so it is not moving.
- Turn the video on prior to meeting with your client and adjust the angle of the device so the camera is showing your face from directly in front.
- Identify the camera on your device and look at it when talking to your client.
- Move the image of your client to the middle, directly below the camera if this is possible.
- Make the client picture as big as you can so you can see expression.
- Clean the camera on a regular basis.
- Turn off other programmes, and sound notifications. E-social work should be the same as when you see someone face to face – no interruptions.
- Use a head set with a microphone or ear buds. This provides for better sound and means only you can hear what is being said.
- Videos take a lot of bandwidth. Keeping still helps to reduce the amount of bandwidth used in transmission.

**Security and confidentiality**

- Work from a space that no one else will be entering.
- You must store all written (electronic or hardcopy) notes securely. Your organisation should have their own guidelines for the storage of notes and client information.
- Check the background. Aim for a plain wall or office type setting.

**Space**

- Set up a space that is your working space. Have all your usual tools – books, pens, to hand.
- Dress appropriately – as you would for a face to face session.
- If you must use a bedroom, ensure that the bed, open wardrobe, set of drawers cannot be seen.
- If you would not have it in your office space or where you meet clients, it should not be in view during your video meetings.
- Adjust your lighting so your face is easy to see.
- When you meet with your client, spend time helping them adjust their lighting so you can see their face clearly.

**Practice**

**Verification of Identity.**

- Identity of the client must be verified. The process for this may well be different for a new and an existing client.
- Video connection means verification of an existing client is straightforward.
• Your organisation should have a method of verifying new clients.
• During the verification process, also verify that this is a good time to talk, and that they are alone. If there are other people present, verify who they are and what part if any they will play in the session.
• Establish a verification method for future sessions, including, if necessary, code words or phrases that indicate something is wrong.
• Gain verbal, informed, consent to the session. Record this in your notes.
• When recording notes, make note that this is a video session, and the reason for this: client is too far away to travel, emergency lockdown, childcare responsibilities, transport not available etc.

**Losing connection**
• Remind clients that the internet could at times be unstable. Tell them that you will call them back to save them trying to reconnect with you at the same time that you are trying to reconnect with them.
• Discuss a back-up plan if you cannot reconnect. Never leave them without a formal finish to the session.
• Use a wired connection if possible, especially when there is high use of the internet.
• Wired connections will maintain the connection over Wi-Fi connections.

**Location.**
• With each client and each session, decide at the beginning if you need to know where the client is for the session.
• Location is important if a welfare check is deemed necessary.
• Discuss your own space and where you are, especially if it is not the office space the client is used to meeting you in.
• Move the camera to show the room and closed door to emphasise privacy.

**The session**
• Building relationships is a fundamental part of social work. This does not change when we are using technology to connect with others.
• Use the above processes as part of your relationship building process.
• Take the time you need to build relationships.
• Provide a culturally responsive service: discuss with you client what will work best for them.
• Aim to be as natural as possible.
• Follow up the session the way you normally would - if you write up a synopsis and provide that, discuss with your client the best way of doing this.
• This discussion should include how to ensure the client receives the information confidentially.

**Supervision**
• Supervision continues to be a requirement for safe social work practice, especially in the evolving landscape of e-social work and remote social work.
• Supervision can also be conducted via video interaction.
• Video conference supervision meets SWRB requirements for supervision for registered social workers.
Considerations when providing remote or E-social work.

- All video connection programmes require the social worker and the client to have internet access and data. Check with your client that they have enough data and a strong enough internet signal to participate in an online session.
- Offering e-social work is a flexible solution so more people can access more services. E-social work should not simply transfer the system that was being used in face to face sessions to video sessions.
- Work with your client to develop innovative solutions for both the situation, and for your social work processes.
- Be willing to offer more sessions of shorter duration, maybe more often. This is often useful if the client has children and other family members to provide care for. It may be easier to schedule two short sessions than one long one.
- We are used to using video conferencing to communicate with friends and family. This may make it harder to maintain usual professional boundaries for both the social worker and the client.
- Discuss with the client your availability for short impromptu sessions to address a specific issue that has arisen for the client.
- Children and young people may find it easier to connect using electronic means. This leads to better engagement. Give consideration to setting some limits around availability.
- Online sessions may make it more likely that your client looks you up – on Facebook or through Google. Check your digital footprint.
- What will you do if an individual client terminates a session, especially following a disclosure of plans or intentions to harm themselves or others?
- It can be more difficult to read body language and expressions when using video.
- Develop alternative solutions when you would normally use a whiteboard, drawing, movement, discussions.

Useful resources and information related to e-social work:
(Some of these are focused on health workers. They are still useful resources)
https://www.telehealth.org.nz/telehealth-forum/what-is-telehealth/
https://ict.usc.edu/prototypes/
https://www.hinz.org.nz/page/AboutHINZ