

Joint RCSLT and ASLTIP guidance for independent therapists

Context

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the RCSLT and [ASLTIP](#) are aware that private practice owners and independent therapists are facing increasingly uncertain situations both financially and professionally.

Both organisations are committed to ensuring they provide as much support and guidance as they can to members.

That being said, many independent therapists/practices are in a good position to weather the conditions brought about by a change in working practices due to their use of telehealth to deliver remote treatments to patients, for example, and will therefore be best placed to help guide the profession in their use of novel practices such as these.

Below are some links and resources that independent practitioners can use to identify risks that the current situation poses for themselves and their businesses.

Business continuity and contingency planning

Business contingency planning is vitally important. Independent SLTs need to seek alternative ways to provide support to their clients if they want to maintain an income, as well as find assistance from other sources.

Some independent therapists own or rent a building to provide therapy from, while others provide support in schools.

The government has set out guidance to support both small and large businesses. This information is being regularly updated, so we encourage therapists to check specific government support packages in your locality.

Useful links include:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19

www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19

www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses

www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/campaign/coronavirus-updates-support-your-business

www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-business-and-employers

www.fsb.org.uk

www.writeupp.com/blog/streamline-your-practice-budgeting-with-our-free-template/

www.writeupp.com/blog/what-grants-and-funding-are-available-to-small-businesses/#sbg

Self-employment Income Support Scheme

The government has introduced a new scheme for self-employed people who have lost income due to coronavirus. The Self-employment Income Support Scheme will allow self-employed individuals or those who are a member of a partnership to claim a taxable grant worth 80% of their trading profits up to a maximum of £2,500 per

month for the next 3 months (April – June). This may be extended. You can find out more about the scheme and who is eligible [here](#).

Risk assessment

The RCSLT recognises that the majority of individuals in community settings have not been tested for COVID-19.

The RCSLT recommends that, prior to face-to-face contact, SLTs confirm an individual's current COVID-19 status and the urgency of any assessment or intervention at each planned contact.

Circumstances may also mean considering delivering care in different modalities, e.g. via telephone or [using telehealth](#). This is in line with guidance from government and the Health and Care Professions Council.

It is critical that SLTs undertake a risk assessment red, amber, green (RAG) rating to prioritise the caseload of individuals, to develop safe protocols to meet their needs and to help with prioritisation of caseloads.

The RCSLT further recommends that:

- a) Non-urgent appointments are reviewed/postponed
- b) SLTs call ahead of seeing any individual to:
 - i. ask if the family are self-isolating or have any symptoms of COVID-19
 - ii. discuss with parents/ carers whether or not they are happy to be seen given that some individuals maybe in vulnerable/at risk groups.

Using novel/remote practices ie telehealth

In response to government measures to address the issues around COVID-19, members are adopting telepractice and remote treatment as a way forward. This is an approach the RCSLT and ASLTIP supports. To help members establish this form of treatment, the RCSLT has made its [telehealth guidance](#) open access so members and non-members alike can draw on it.

The charity [SWGfI](#) has also produced some useful guidance for therapists on the remote provision of therapy to children within schools and at home, which includes information on GDPR, etc.

[ASLTIP](#) has sourced information specific to using teletherapy with clients in their home environment. Regular updates will be shared on the ASLTIP forum and ASLTIP members are also sharing information daily on the members' forum.

Useful links include:

www.bethebrightest.com/conferences/slp-telecon

support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360029527911

www.presencelearning.com/determining-whos-appropriate-for-telepractice/

GDPR and information governance when using telehealth or remote treatment methods

[The Information Commissioner's Office](#) has produced [guidance on information governance and GDPR in response to the COVID-19 outbreak](#). This guidance seeks to alleviate concerns around the sharing of information when using new or different ways of working such as telehealth or remote access.

Guidance on meeting the needs of children and young people in light of school closures

Schools contracting SLTs independently should support alternative ways of working (as outlined above) in the first instance.

Schools across the UK have been closed from Monday 23 March 2020. It is not known when they will re-open.

Schools are being asked to continue to provide care for a limited number of children: children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response. Information on which children are included in these categories is provided in separate guidance for England, Scotland, Wales and [Northern Ireland](#).

The RCSLT is aware of members' concerns regarding provision of services to children who have an EHCP (in England); a Co-ordinated Support Plan (in Scotland); or Statement of Special Educational Needs (in Wales and Northern Ireland). We are raising those concerns with the relevant government agencies with a view to developing guidance.

The RCSLT would encourage speech and language therapy services and, where appropriate, individual members to make contact with the local authorities and schools they work in, and the families of the children they support, to discuss how information, advice and support can continue to be provided to staff, children and families. This may include considering the use of telephone and video conferencing. Risk assessments should be undertaken to protect the safety of children, families, school staff and SLTs as far as possible.

Statutory Requirements

The government has introduced emergency legislation that includes powers for education settings to relax provision for children and young people with statutory plans or statements

In England, the Coronavirus Act (2020) has given the Secretary of State for Education the power to relax the requirements for local authorities to secure the special educational and health care provision as set out in an EHCP. If the Secretary of State were to use those powers, local authorities would instead need to use ‘reasonable endeavours’ to ensure that provision continues to be available to meet education, health and care needs. Guidance from the Department for Education states that educational settings, local authorities, health bodies, parents and young people with special educational needs and disabilities should work together to respond pragmatically and flexibly to each individual’s needs. You can read the [full guidance here](#).

In Scotland, the Act says that failure by education authorities to make adequate provision for children and young people with additional support needs can be disregarded if the failure is due to a direction from Scottish ministers to close schools or other educational establishments. Deputy First Minister John Swinney has stated that “local authorities are creatively considering different ways of supporting young people with different needs during this period, for example using outreach models and joining up available staff to provide care, support and continuity” and that Scottish Government “will encourage local authorities to maintain as much continuity as possible.”

The Welsh Government has stated that “local authorities have a duty to meet the needs of learners for whom it maintains a statement of SEN” and that where learners are no longer attending school, alternative arrangements including online therapy, should be considered. You can read the [full guidance here](#).

For Northern Ireland, the Act gives the Department of Education (DoE) powers to dis-apply or modify existing duties in relation to special educational needs,

assessments and statements, including the duties on health and social service authorities. We will update this information with further guidance from the DoE when it is published.

Insurance concerns

The RCSLT insurance policy has been developed to protect members against claims raised from alleged clinical negligence, or whose fitness to practice has been brought into question for any reason. Unfortunately the policy does not include provision to cover members own personal loss of earnings. Those with other forms of business or personal insurance should check with their provider on the levels of cover their policies provide.

Many independent therapists will have organised additional business insurance cover which may include cover for any loss of earnings, we would encourage members to check with their individual insurance agencies as to discuss levels of cover.

This guidance was produced in conjunction with Ruth Crampton, acting chair of [ASLTIP](#)