

Online Counseling And Therapy

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There are certain ethics involved in providing coaching and when you're doing it online, the risks become even more pronounced. Technology brings with it advantages but also another set of problems and among these are ethics. "We need ethical standards and practice standards for how we conduct ourselves in the online environment," says Dr. Pat Williams, psychologist, author, and a master certified coach.

The International Coach Federation has ethical standards all coaches should follow, and this is no different for online coaches. The Online Therapy Institute (www.onlinetherapyinstitute.com) created by DeeAnna Nagel offers a complete code of ethical standards that apply to online therapy, and are equally important to online coaching.

Moreover, notes Dr. Williams, the use of email to deliver therapeutic interventions opens several areas of potential risk to online consumers. Clients of online services can be at greater risk for breaches in confidentiality. This increased risk to confidentiality occurs at the therapist's end, at the client's end, in the transmission of information, and in the potential for legal subpoena of records.

"Therapists using the internet to deliver therapeutic interventions should evaluate the security of their websites and computers against outside intrusions that would compromise client confidentiality. These intrusions might include high-tech invasions by hackers downloading files from the therapist's computer, to low-tech intrusions involving the inappropriate availability of the client's email to the therapist's office staff or family members," explains Williams.

Firewalls, passwords, and backup data storage systems will help to increase the security of email communications and to protect against the inadvertent loss of clinical files resulting from computer malfunctions.

In general, when it comes to online coaching and therapy, all of the standards of the American Psychological Association ethics code apply, including standards on informed consent, competence to practice, confidentiality, doing no harm, and on how terminations, interruption of service and payment arrangements are handled.

As a professional therapist and/or coach, you don't want your expertise compromised by an online malfunction or miscommunication. Do your homework and understand along with the wealth of advantages of being online, it also comes with risks. Knowing those risks will, in the long run, benefit you and your patient.