

Skype Counselling: see your therapist from the comfort of your own home

One of the most exciting developments in counselling comes from marrying traditional therapist skills with online technology: counselling via Skype online video link.

"Skype" is free computer software that permits people to chat face-to-face, in real-time, through their computer screens. Skype is speedy to download, and so long as you have a web camera and microphone, you will be able to be seen and heard by anyone at any point in the world for free if they also have the programme and equipment in place.

Research indicates that the outcome for clients who have undertaken counselling via video link can be similar to those having standard therapy in person. In 2012, psychologist Dr Autumn Backhaus and her associates conducted a literature review of studies on videoconferencing psychotherapy (VCP), examining 65 articles. They concluded that this form of counselling is "generally associated with good user satisfaction and is found to have similar clinical outcomes to traditional face-to-face psychotherapy".

Not all client issues may be appropriate for counselling via video link (see later section Online counselling: factors to consider), and being in the same room with your counsellor will generally be many clients' first preference. However, time restrictions and other commitments at home mean it can be difficult for people to arrange regular counselling sessions. To meet this demand, more and more counsellors are offering the possibility of therapy via Skype. The benefits to the client can be immense.

Advantages of counselling via Skype

- Rather than being limited to a local counsellor that you can travel to easily, you can choose to see a counsellor anywhere in the country – or indeed the world! Study after study shows that it's the quality of the relationship between client and counsellor that is the most important factor in client

improvement. Without the restrictions of geographical location, it's much easier for you to pick a counsellor who truly suits your needs.

- Skype counselling saves you time and money, as you don't have to factor in the duration and cost of travelling to and from the session. Shut the door, switch on your computer, log on to Skype and there you are – having your counselling session from the comfort of your own home!
- You see your counsellor in familiar surroundings, rather than in their office. As long as you have a quiet space and a good internet connection, you can have your counselling session from any location, including your place of work if that suits you.
- Online counselling opens up this form of help to groups of people who previously would find it difficult if not impossible to travel to a face-to-face meeting, such as those who have restricted mobility, are housebound for any reason, live in remote areas, or do not have childcare.
- If you happen to be away from home, you can still have your counselling session as long as you have the technology set up.
- Clients who have had counselling via Skype say that seeing the counsellor from home makes them feel more relaxed, safe and in control of the process, allowing them to open up to the counsellor more readily. It can feel less intimidating than being directly face-to-face with the counsellor, and easier to discuss problems you find embarrassing.
- Your counsellor will speak to you from a private room and the usual rules of confidentiality apply to what passes between you, the same as in a normal one-to-one therapy session. Payment is usually made before the session, via an online, secure payment system such as PayPal.
- A big advantage with choosing a therapist who doesn't live locally is that you know you're not going to bump into them when you're out shopping, or discover that your neighbour is also seeing them.
- Shift workers and those whose jobs involve irregular hours or a lot of travelling can find it difficult to get a regular face-to-face counselling slot. While it's usual to see your counsellor at the same time and on the same day each week, therapists who work via Skype are often more flexible with session times.

Online counselling: factors to consider

- Skype counselling is not suitable for those who are at risk of suicide, in acute crisis, or have serious mental health issues; there are limits to what a counsellor can do remotely. In such cases, your GP is always your first port of call. Couples counselling is not generally offered via Skype.
- For Skype counselling, you need a high-speed broadband connection, plus a web cam and microphone on your computer. These can be purchased fairly inexpensively if your machine doesn't have them. In the initial online meeting, you and your prospective counsellor will check that you have a sufficiently good internet connection for counselling to take place. If one of you is only seeing the other's face in pixelated form, counselling online will be a struggle.
- You have to ensure you can be online at the appointed time, in a quiet space where you won't be interrupted or overheard.
- Bear in mind there is always going to be a risk of the technology failing, which would be especially alarming if it occurred at a critical point in the session. You and your counsellor will agree what to do in the event of a technical glitch.
- While not occupying the same physical space as their counsellor will be part of the appeal for some people, others might find it disconcerting. There is no handshake when you first meet and at the end of a course of therapy, no taking the therapist's tissues at emotional moments, and no settling into the familiar chair in your counsellor's room each week. Use the online counsellor auditions to gauge how you feel during a virtual therapy session.
- Skype counselling isn't for everyone. If you don't feel it's working after a few sessions, you and your counsellor might conclude that you need a different type of help.

A final word

Technology is rapidly changing the way we interact, so it's only right that counselling is moving with the times and making talking treatments accessible to many more people than was previously the case via their computers as well as smart phones and tablets. As life gets ever busier, the option of counselling via Skype affords fresh

opportunities to enlist professional help and learn new ways of managing emotional distress.

Call me today to book your SKYPE/Whatsapp Video session. 07769156076

Comment from Skype client -

“You are teaching me so much in these sessions. I look forward to our sessions. You are amazing. So understated yet move mountains. Thank you so much.”