

Online Supervision and Remote Placements: Towards Safe Uncertainty for Trainees

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My experience of training in the Covid era has been that the inevitable uncertainties – How do I...? – have been complicated by the demands of learning to work online and by the isolation of home-working.

These are my thoughts about how supervisors can help trainees to know what they can know, and to be open about the inevitable uncertainties, for which I have borrowed the systemic notion of positions of safe uncertainty (Mason, 1993).

1. **Using the competencies as a framework.** Encouraging trainees to keep referring back to the generic and other competencies to ask how these can be practised online. Examples:
 - How do I convey empathy on a video call?
 - How do I explain the five areas formulation when the online platform I have to use does not support screensharing?
 - How do I engage with the team and the community when I have to work from home?
 - How do we arrange observations and client recordings in an online space with due regard to information governance?
2. **Avoid making assumptions about knowledge or experience.** Anecdotally as well as from my own experience, I am aware it can be difficult to be open with supervisors about what we don't know as trainees. I think it's helpful for supervisors to normalise this, rather than colluding with it, and addressing the online context may be a helpful way to acknowledge that we are all learners.
3. **Be curious about how the trainee and client diversity might relate to their online experience.** If you come from a position of privilege, don't wait for trainees from marginalised groups to raise this issue. Examples:
 - Trainees from marginalised groups may feel further isolated from teams, or may have experienced the online world as unsafe if they have experienced cyber-bullying;
 - Clients and/or trainees may live in large families, making privacy difficult, or may live in places where there is no reliable internet connection;
4. **Don't forget the simple things!** Arrange an admin induction to address basics of working remotely, e.g. how do I send a letter?!
5. **Be creative with the possibilities of online work.** I found that the extra time I had due to not having to travel allowed me to set up online reflective practice groups, explore opportunities for online teaching, and think about other ways of contributing remotely to the team.
6. **Don't worry about not knowing.** My experience is that it is reassuring to work with a supervisor who is able to be open about what they don't know about online working, as long as this leads to a conversation about how we are going to find out!