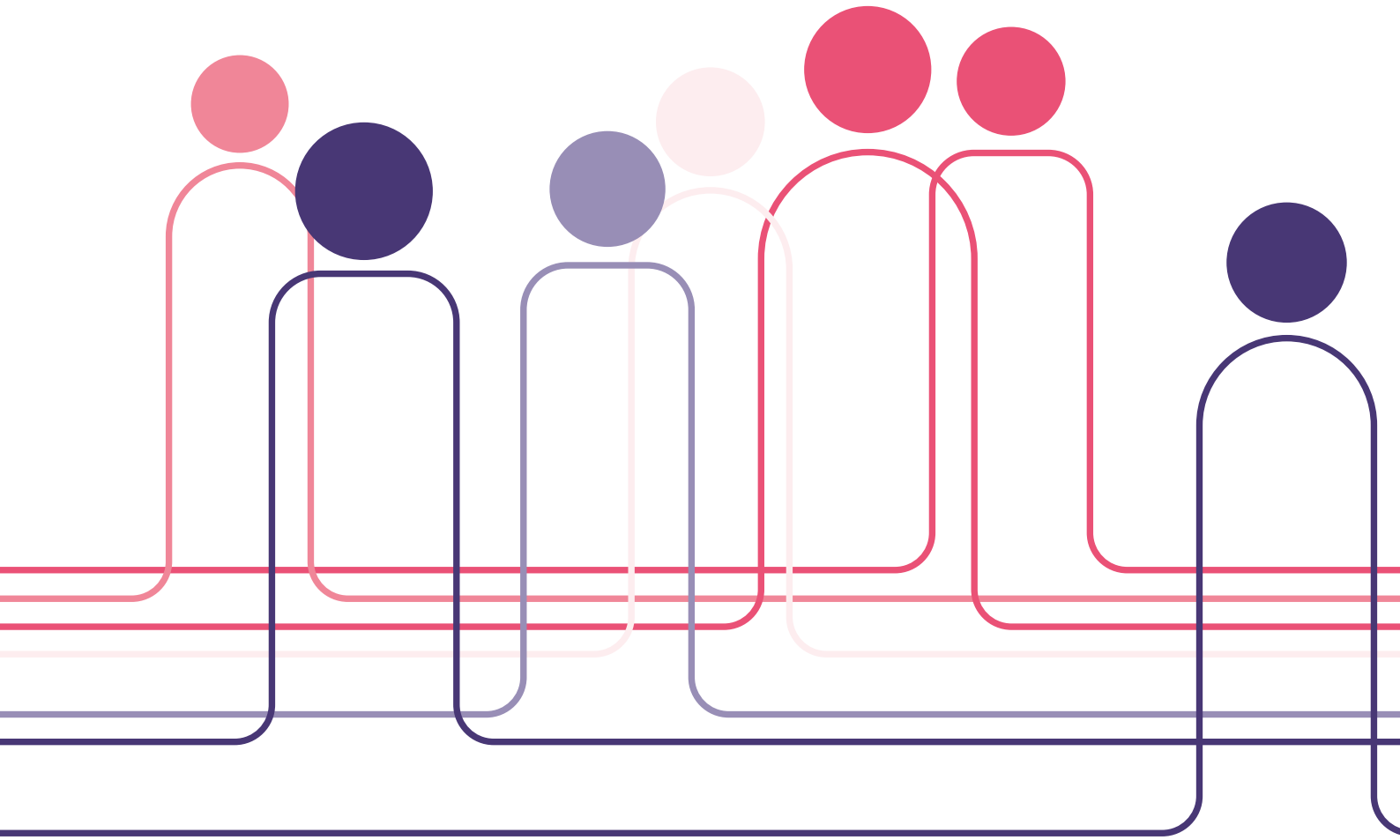
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A quick guide: Lone working Part 1



Checklist

Ethics Essentials

Location – safety considerations

Introduction

In a recent survey of BACP members, 79% (n=694) said they work alone; 15% said they'd experienced violence or aggression while working with clients and or colleagues; this figure is significantly higher than the national average of 1.3% (BACP and Suzy Lamplugh Trust 2019).

The survey found that 92% of violent or aggressive incidents were carried out by clients or ex-clients and nearly 10% said they were perpetrated by a colleague or ex-colleague. In some cases, respondents experienced violence or aggression from clients and colleagues.

The types of incidents included verbal abuse, threats, sexual harassment and stalking. This highlights a potential risk for therapists when working alone. Forty-three percent of those affected said it had impacted their ability to do their job and had had a long-term effect on their confidence.

In the survey, 22% said they hadn't reported the incidents. Some of the reasons they gave included feeling unclear about the procedures and policies in place, what evidence they needed to report, and that they were anxious about breaking confidentiality. Some were fearful of the therapeutic relationship breaking down and consequently ending work with the client. They were worried this could cause a loss of the relationship and loss of earnings.

How to use this resource

Members have a contractual commitment to work in line with the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*. This lone-working resource isn't contractually binding on members, but it's intended to give support by condensing relevant information and guidance into practical recommendations, which are valid at the time of publication. Recommendations given are in the context of the core ethical principles, values and personal moral qualities of BACP.

Specific issues in practice will vary depending on clients, models of working, the context of the work and the kind of therapeutic intervention provided. Specific issues that emerge from client work are often complex, and we always recommend discussing practice dilemmas with a supervisor or consulting a qualified and experienced legal or other relevant practitioner.

In this resource, we use the word 'therapist' to describe counsellors and psychotherapists, and 'therapy' to describe counselling and psychotherapy. We use the term 'practitioner' to include those working in the practices of counselling, psychotherapy, coaching and pastoral care.

Working safely from home

Advertising your practice

- don't advertise your address
- minimise the amount of personal information you include
- consider having a separate home phone and phone number for your business
- let withheld numbers go to answerphone
- contact the Suzy Lamplugh Trust if you have any concerns
- report inappropriate callers to the police
- 'buy time' before agreeing to see a client if you feel uncomfortable
- ask a few questions about why they are seeking counselling at this time (without the call becoming a counselling session in itself)
- ask for their address (they may be unwilling to give it if they are not genuine)
- trust your instincts.

Planning

- how safe might you feel working alone?
- will you be working alone for part or all of your time?
- do you have a personal lone-working plan or procedure in place?
- does the existing plan or procedure work?
- what would need to change to make it work?
- do you know which support services to contact should you find yourself the victim of a violent incident?

If you don't have a policy, it might be worth creating one of your own, including a procedure such as a 'buddy system'. This involves checking in with a designated relative, friend, or colleague at a pre-determined time and with a specific message before the session begins and after the client has gone. You might want to think about how you feel about responsibility, who has responsibility for whom, and what would happen if you don't make contact by the agreed time.

For it to be meaningful, both parties need to respond by a set time and to know the procedure (pre-defined by you), should the check-in not take place. For more information download the Personal Safety leaflets from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust website: www.suzylamplugh.org/personal-safety-leaflets.

Security

- is the outer door of the property lockable?
- can anyone enter the home or room while you're in session with your client?
- could you get locked in (with or without your client)?
- could you get locked out (with or without your client)?
- could someone else be in the building, especially for first appointments with a new client and with clients where there may be a risk of violence or aggression? (This is for your own safety and to make the client aware that you're not alone.)
- If no one else is in the building, how can you make it 'look' like you're not alone? (For example, having extra lights on in other rooms or low-level noise.)
- how would you communicate a safety issue if one arose? Is there anyone who you can have a 'buddy system' with? What situations might need a different communication? When might you need to call the police?
- do you have access to a working phone?
- the purpose of a personal safety alarm is to shock and disorientate an attacker, giving you vital seconds to get away. Do you carry a personal alarm? If so, do you carry it with you all the time or only with certain clients? (The Suzy Lamplugh Trust website has further guidance on using a personal alarm.)
- where would you go if an incident occurred and you needed to escape?

Hours of work

- are there parts of the day where you might feel more or less vulnerable working alone? Does your level of vulnerability mean you actually are more or less at risk? What action will you take if you feel unable to work at certain hours?
- are there parts of the day where you might feel more or less vulnerable working alone with particular clients?

Room

- do you feel safe working in the room?
- do you and your client have easy access to the exit?
- is a first aid kit available and kept up to date?
- is there anything in the room that could be used to harm yourself or others?

Role

- when does an exchange with a client change from being 'the work' to unacceptable aggression or violence?

Personal information

Hide items that disclose personal information from view. Think about the personal information clients might have access to including family members, pets, photographs and letters. What can they see when entering, during and leaving the session?

What level of self-disclosure do you use during your work? What information could be subsequently used in an unhelpful way by a client?

Contracting

- be clear and transparent about confidentiality and situations when this may have to be broken (e.g. risk of harm to self and others, obstruction of justice, act of terrorism, current safeguarding issue)
- use the assessment session/s (see section 2) to establish if you can safely and competently work with each client, and offer additional assessment sessions where needed
- be prepared to decline ongoing sessions or refer on if you feel uncomfortable working with certain clients
- understand your own perception of when an exchange with a client changes from being 'the work' to unacceptable aggression or violence
- make use of supervision to reflect on safety issues for you and your client especially if you're new to working alone
- make use of supervision to reflect on transference, countertransference and erotic transference reactions
- make sure temporary, alternative supervision arrangements are in place to cover supervisor's holiday or incapacitation (standard practice)
- establish clear boundaries around contact outside sessions. For example, how or whether to acknowledge each other if you happen to meet elsewhere. Having a separate work phone can help with this, so you do not have to respond to out-of- hours contact until you are ready to or at an agreed time. Some clients may struggle with no out-of-hours contact, so clear contracting and maintaining boundaries will help both you and your client to remain safe
- be clear and unambiguous about endings, plan wherever possible, and be mindful of the client's attachment style and their possible responses to endings (standard practice with any client).

Identity

The Equalities Act 2010 protects certain characteristics, such as race, religion, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, and age, from discrimination in law but doesn't necessarily equate to a reduced risk of attack. While responsibility for an attack lies firmly with the attacker, it's important to consider if you or your client could be more susceptible to hate crime simply because of your, or their, identity. Will your personal safety policy be impacted by this? You might want to decide if your working address will be in the public domain, and what you can do to better protect yourself.

Previous experience

Our previous experiences in childhood, at work or leisure time, can impact our sense of personal safety and affect the way we interpret danger. What situations might make you feel more or less vulnerable in any given situation? For example, have you had an experience of being lost, abandoned, frightened, attacked or abused? Can you identify a way that might put you more at risk of an attack from others? Knowing this upfront can help us assess our level of risk when working alone.

Additional considerations when working from a rented office space or other people's homes

Security

- who else will be in the building while the sessions are running?
- do you feel safe knowing others are present? How will you maintain confidentiality?
- if using the client's house, do they need a carer or interpreter present? Could a constant third-party present constitute a potentially controlling relationship? How might you address this so sessions can be protected without endangering the client or yourself?

Parking

- do you or your client drive a distinguishable vehicle that could make you or them more identifiable? If so, are you, or do you feel at, greater risk?

Building

- do you know who to contact in the event of an issue with the building? And how best to contact them?
- do you have a fire policy or officer?
- do you have a designated first aider?
- are first aid kits available and kept up to date?
- is there a receptionist in the building?
- are there areas in the building where you might feel more or less vulnerable?
- if the owner or client has pets, could they pose a personal safety risk? How might you request their removal?

The room

- do both you and your client have easy access to the exit? If not, will you still use the room?
- is there anything in the room that could be used as a weapon? Is it possible to temporarily remove the items while you're using the room? If the room belongs to the client, would you agree to continue the sessions if the items remained in the room? How might you negotiate their removal?

Contracting

- do you have the opportunity/freedom to talk through any concerns with the client or owner of the room?
- what course of action do you take if open discussion is not possible?
- if the owner of the room is the client, how might you contract differently?
- are there changes you need to make to your contract regarding anything about the premises that you do not particularly like but cannot influence? What transference and countertransference reactions might be present based on these items/situations? Can these be discussed openly in supervision? Do you have access to emergency supervision if required?

- if the client can't get to your premises, would you ever agree to meet them in their own home? On what grounds would you agree or disagree to this request? Might you respond differently if they were persistent in their request?
- if a fellow practitioner uses the same premises as you, how might you respond if you feel they aren't being mindful of lone-working practices? Could you discuss your lone-working practices with them, so they could put them into practice?

Personal safety checklist

- There's no risk of getting locked in or locked out
- Easy access to exit
- Removed any items that could be used to cause harm
- Access to a working phone with network reception and battery
- Access to personal safety alarm
- Someone else in the building
- Buddy system set-up
- First aid kit available
- Identified where you would go and how you'd get there if you needed to call for help.

Additional concerns when visiting a client's home

- Legitimate reason for client requiring a home visit
- Checked who else will be in the building
- Checked risk from other sources (pets, items, others in the building).

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