

Module 7: Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Author: Pantelis Balaouras – Greek Academic Network – www.gunet.gr

THERAPY 2.0 Training Course: 9 Modules

1. Introduction

2. The spectrum of technology-enhanced information & communication tools

3. Characteristics of computer-mediated communication in counselling and therapy

4. Legal aspects

5. Ethical aspects of the e-tools / e-consulting

6. Economic and financial aspects



7. Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

8. Psychological aspects and competences in online interventions

9. ICT based counselling for asylum seekers, refugees and unaccompanied minors

Module overview

This module discusses the technical competences that advisors, counsellors, therapists have to master if they are interested in using online services and communication tools, such as website, email, video/voice chatting/conferencing tools for communicating with their clients.

Module objectives

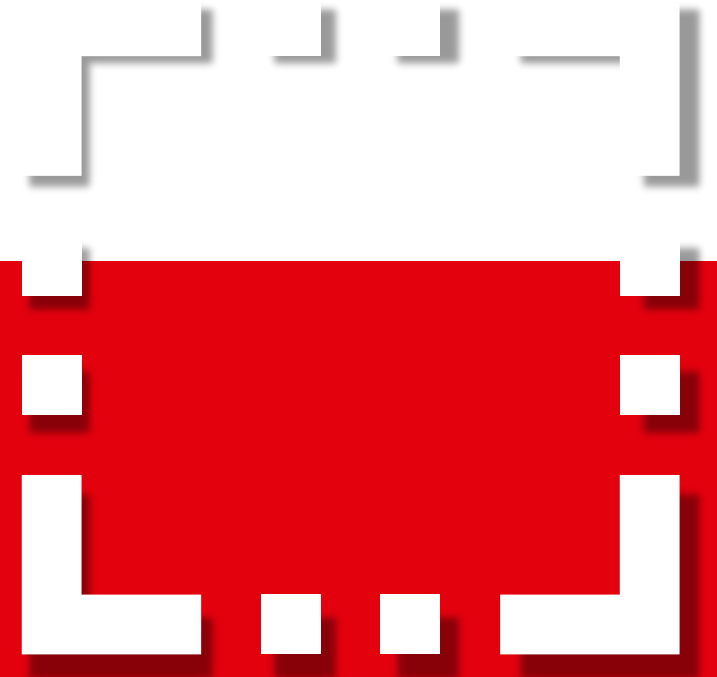
Upon completion of this course, the learner should be able to

- ✓ be aware about the required functionality of his/her professional website
- ✓ be able to guide his/her clients on how to protect their health and personal information
- ✓ be competent on choosing the proper tools and applications for a safe online communication with his/her client



Module outline

- Introduction
- Unit 7.1: Website & general technical requirements
- Unit 7.2: General guidelines for Internet users
- Unit 7.3: Specific guidelines for advisors, counsellors, therapists



7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Some questions for you...

Are you aware about the functionality and the requirements that have to be fulfilled by your website?

Are you in position to advice your clients how to protect their sensitive data?

Do you feel competent in using email and video/voice chatting tools in a safe way regarding data privacy?

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Technical competence requirements

The requirements regarding technical competence may be classified in the following categories:

- i. **Website content requirements:** what should be included in a professional website.
- ii. **General technical requirements** regarding the hardware and software equipment.
- iii. **General online safety practices and precautions** that is how an Internet user can protect him/herself from online criminals.
- iv. **Specific Requirements** for advisors, counsellors and therapists (professionals) for protecting personal and health information data regarding their clients.

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Unit 7.1 Website & general technical requirements

Section Outline

- Website - a basic tool for professionals
- Website's features
- Software and hardware requirements
- What is online safety, data security and privacy standards



7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Website – a basic tool for professionals

Advisors, counsellors and therapists are using websites to present the services they provide as a basic tool for reaching their potential clients; therefore, the **website is of great importance** for an advisor, counsellor or therapist. Professional web designers should assist in designing the website and proposing the hosting options.

A website should include, in addition to the information of the provided services, a presentation of the professional (advisor, counsellor, therapist), the location, their availability, contact information, the language the professional uses, the technological tools for communication, the cost of treatment and ways of payment, as well as other information that may be of interest to the client.

Special attention should be paid on the legal text, such as Imprint, Disclaimer and General Terms and Conditions, that should be included in the website/portal.



7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Website's features

The website should be aesthetically attractive, look professional and provide features, such as the following:

- ✓ Online calendars for viewing the availability
- ✓ Online forms requesting appointments
- ✓ Online tools for remote communication
- ✓ Online payment methods
- ✓ Online maps
- ✓ Blogging functionality for publishing introductory articles on topics of their expertise

The website should be safe for its users, provide data security and fulfil the privacy standards.



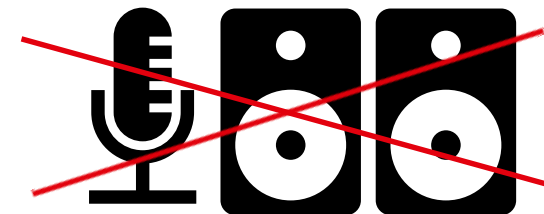
7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Software and hardware requirements

For audio and video communication the proper **software** must be downloaded and installed either in a computer or mobile device.

Mobile devices, such as tablets, smartphones, and laptops are equipped with video camera, **microphone** and **loudspeaker**.

However, in case of a desktop computer, a web camera and a headset with a microphone are required (*do not use speakers and other types of microphone*) in order to avoid audio problems such as echo and feedback.



7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

What is online safety, data security and privacy standards

Online safety, or **Internet Safety**, is the knowledge of the self-protection practices and precautions, that should be applied for ensuring that i) personal and sensitive data (e.g., health information) remain private (information privacy), and, ii) the computer itself and the data stored in it remain safe (data security).

Information privacy, or data privacy (or data protection), is the relationship among the collection and dissemination of data, technology, the public expectation of privacy, and the legal and political issues on them. Privacy concerns exist wherever personally identifiable information or other sensitive information is collected, stored, used, and finally destroyed or deleted – in digital form or otherwise. Improper or non-existent disclosure control can be the root cause for privacy issues.

Data security means protecting data, such as those in a database, from destructive forces and from the unwanted actions of unauthorized users.

Privacy standards are regulations that protect citizens' data privacy. Typical standards are the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that replaces the Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC, and the US Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) privacy rule.

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Unit 7.2: General guidelines for Internet users

Section Outline

- Introduction
- Protecting computer and data
- Protecting Personal Information (PI)
- Be careful with emails



7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Introduction

This unit is addressed not only to the professionals but also to their clients. Often the clients do not take any precaution for protecting sensitive data during the communication with the professionals. So, **the professionals has to guide them regarding the online safety**. This unit may be used for this purpose.

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Protecting computer and data

Precautions need to be taken for **protecting a computer or mobile device and data from being accessed** by online criminals.

Specifically:

- ✓ **Use the latest versions** of an operating system, install antivirus and firewall software and check for updates regularly.
- ✓ **Avoid downloading free software** from sites that are not known or trusted. Download software only from well-known and trusted companies. Many free programs (applications) are delivering adware and spyware to a computer or mobile device.
- ✓ **Take backup** (create a copy) of the data to one or more external storage devices. Use password protected backups if the device supports it.



7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Protecting Personal Information

Online safety means protecting professional's and the client's **personal information** (information privacy) while online, that is, while interacting with websites, exchanging emails, video/voice and text chats, etc. Details such as address, full name, telephone number, birth date and/or social security number can be potentially used by online criminals. Ensure that in case the professional or the client need to provide personal information, the website is trusted (reputable companies or governmental agencies) and secured. Always read the site's privacy policy. In case of on-line payment, give out only information necessary for the purchase, such as a shipping address and credit card number. Never give out passwords, pin numbers or bank account details.

While sharing information is a key issue in social networking, setting boundaries, such as limiting who can view account's profile and photographs, has become a common safety practice. This method aims to protect the social network users not just from identity thieves, but also from stalkers and sex offenders, who have, in rare cases, used sites to target victims.



7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Be careful with emails

Online safety also applies to email use. Phishing is common type of online scam where criminals send official-looking emails in an attempt the user to reveal details that may be used for identity theft.

Emails can also contain viruses.



7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Hints: stay secure

- **About devices:** Use a device dedicated for communicating with the clients, other than that one use as an Internet user.
 - **About passwords:** Use strong (not simple) passwords in the used devices, apps and services. Do not share the password to anyone. Change the password regularly.
 - **About antivirus and firewall:** Install antivirus and firewall software in the devices. Update the definition files often. Upgrade the software as soon as a new version is available.
- **About emails:** Avoid opening attachments unless they have been through an anti-virus program, remember to log off, especially when using a shared public computer, delete all emails from unknown persons and never reply to spam.
 - **About apps and services:** Update regularly the apps, be sure to use the latest version. Ask the remote parties (clients or collaborators) to upgrade the apps to the latest version. Check the privacy/security options of the apps and services used.
 - **About websites:** Do not provide personal and sensitive information in sites with links starting with “http://”. Instead, make sure that is “https://”. Read the sites’ privacy policy.

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Unit 7.3: Specific guidelines for advisors, counsellors, therapists

Section Outline

- Introduction
- EU privacy standard: GDPR
- Collecting and store confidential data in accordance with GDPR
- US privacy rule: HIPAA
- Guidelines for privacy standards
- Specific guidelines for email
- Is Gmail secured?
- Guidelines for Video calls and Skype



7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Introduction

Before providing specific guidelines for advisors, counsellors and therapists, the privacy standards of **General Data Protection Regulation** (GDPR) and **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act** (HIPAA) that apply for the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) are presented, respectively.

GDPR

HIPAA

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

EU privacy standard: GDPR

The EU **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** replaces the Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC and was designed to harmonize data privacy laws across Europe, **to protect and empower all EU citizens' data privacy** and to reshape the way organizations across the region approach data privacy. GDPR was approved by the EU Parliament on 14 April 2016. The enforcement date is **25 May 2018** - at which time those organizations in non-compliance will face heavy fines.

According to Article 4 (1) the term “**personal data**” means *“any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person; an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person.”*

According to Article 4 (15) “**Data concerning health**” are defined as *“personal data related to the physical or mental health of a natural person, including the provision of health care services, which reveal information about his or her health status.”*



Source: GDPR official website <http://www.eugdpr.org/>

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Collecting and store confidential data in accordance with GDPR

Advisors, counsellors and therapists should ensure to **collect and store confidential data**, client contact (personal) and health data **in accordance with GDPR**. Some requirements are presented below:

- **Consent is required for collecting personal data.** The withdraw consent capability must be given to the individuals. If data has not been gathered with a GDPR compliant process, the individual has to be contacted again so as to provide the appropriate consent.
- **Personal and health data should be kept secure.** This obligation is expressed in general terms but does indicate some enhanced measures, such as encryption.



Source: GDPR official website <http://www.eugdpr.org/>

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

US privacy rule: HIPAA

- The **HIPAA Privacy Rule** establishes national standards for United States to **protect individuals' medical records and other personal health information (PHI)** and applies to health plans, health care clearinghouses, and those health care providers that conduct certain health care transactions electronically.
- The Rule requires appropriate safeguards to protect the **privacy of personal health information**, and **sets limits** and conditions **on the uses** and disclosures that may be made of such information without patient authorization.
- The Rule also gives patients' rights over their health information, including rights to examine and **obtain a copy of their health records**, and to request corrections.
- HIPAA compliance is required only when there is interaction with U.S. based health services and client.


HIPAA

Source: HIPAA official website <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/index.html>

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Guidelines for privacy standards

Staying compliant with privacy standards (GDPR, HIPAA) **is very important** when using third-party platforms to communicate with clients! To comply with standards, it is important to only use platforms that abide by their rules.




Hint: Use services that are GDPR compliant for EU practitioners or HIPAA for US practitioners and that provide Business Associate Agreement with the user regarding the whole set of tools being used (email, video/voice calls, text based chatting).

Source: HIPAA official website <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/index.html>

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Specific guidelines for email

Email is an important tool for advisors, counsellors and therapists but it **is secured only if both sides** (therapist/counsellor and client) use **the same encrypted email service**. It would be impractical for an advisor /counsellor /therapist to require all of the clients to use the particular email provider used by the advisor/counsellor/therapist.



Hint: Use email only for initial communication. In the reply of an email do not include the original communication sent by the client or any health information or reference to it.

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

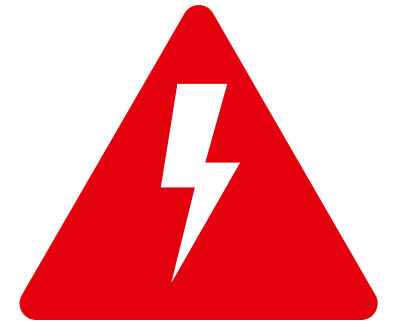
Is Gmail secured?

If the advisor/counsellor/therapist is using an encrypted email service for sending a message to a client who uses the free version of Gmail or other provider (which is the vast majority, then, by the time this message arrives on Google's servers, **it is scanned and harvested in order to provide contextual and target advertisements** — not just within the Gmail application, but among the entire Google advertisement network, although Google has announced in June 2017 that the email scanning will stop from 2018.

For example, if a professional sends to a client an email reminding him/her to take lamotrigine or send an email mentioning hospitalization options, then “suddenly” as the client is surfing the web, targeted advertising will appear about hospitals, depression, bipolar disorder and treatment facilities. Imagine the precautions in case their spouse or friends use this same computer.

This all happens regardless of how “secure” the particular email account appears to be.

Source: <http://onlinetherapyinstitute.com/article/therapist-coach-guide-encryption-brian-dear/>



7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Guidelines for Video calls and Skype

Skype has been an advisor/counsellor/therapist favourite for several years. Cheap, nearly ubiquitous and generally reliable. However, **Skype is not HIPAA or GDPR compliant.**

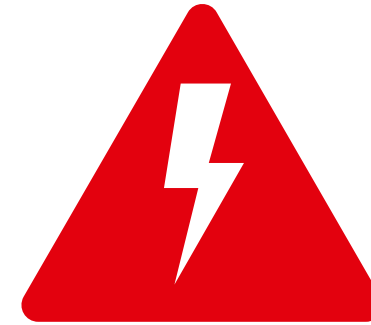
The first indicator is that Microsoft (the owner of Skype) although provides Business Associate Agreement (BAA) for its cloud services, does not include Skype within its BAA. Since there is no way to obtain a Microsoft BAA for Skype, it is not compliant to the privacy standards.

Another problem with Skype is that, despite claimed encryption, chat transcripts are stored on Skype servers. By looking at the Skype conversations, the user can see months of chat history — all stored on a platform that isn't GDPR or HIPAA compliant. There are records of the participants in a conversation and its duration — all egregious violations of patient privacy since that information is not guaranteed secure, nor a BAA is protecting the user from legal exposure in the event of a Skype data breach.

References

HIPAA/HITECH Act Implementation Guidance for Microsoft Office 365 and Microsoft Dynamics CRM Online (not SKYPE) <http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkID=257510>

Accelerate GDPR compliance with the Microsoft Cloud <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/trustcenter/Privacy/GDPR>



Hint: Search and find video therapy platforms compliant to privacy standards with the provider be willing to provide a BAA and the platform be easy to use and ensure the widest accessibility for the clients.

Source: Brian Dear. [A Therapist and Coach Guide to Encryption.](#)

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Hint: Search for more information



How can I find more information?

For more information, search in Internet with the following key – words: “Online safety”, “GDPR compliance”, HIPAA compliance”, along with “Messaging Applications”, “Video chat”, “Voice chat”, and the name of apps or service planned to be used, e.g., “SKYPE encryption” or “SKYPE GDPR compliance”, “SKYPE HIPAA compliance”.



Check your knowledge

1. Which are the minimum features of a professional website for advisors, counsellors, therapists?
2. Which are the basic hints that a professional has to give to its clients regarding data protection and online safety?
3. What is the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)?
4. Are gmail and Skype compliant to the GDPR?

Results

1. The website shall provide elements such as, online calendar for viewing professional's availability, online forms for submitting questions and asking meeting dates, information about location (e.g., online maps), online payment, online voice or video communication.
2. See slide with title "*Hints: stay secure*".
3. The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was designed to harmonize data privacy laws across Europe, to protect and empower all EU citizens' data privacy and to reshape the way organizations across the region approach data privacy. It replaces the Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC.
4. No. You must use online tools and services that ensure the privacy and security of your clients' data during the online communication with them, that is tools and services that are compliant with privacy standards (GDPR, HIPAA).

7 Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Imprint

Project: Therapy 2.0

Coordinator: media k GmbH, Goethestr. 10, D-97980 Bad Mergentheim,
phone +497931 99 27 30, fax +49 7931 99 27 31

URL: <https://www.ecounselling4youth.eu>

Project number: 2016-1-DE02-KA202-003245

Funding program: Erasmus+

Author of Module 7 – Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

Pantelis Balaouras – contact: : p.balaouras@noc.uoa.gr

© **Pictures:**

- velin Radkov– Fotolia.com
- Pixabay CC0 Creative Commons
- Microsoft Clipart Gallery
- GDPR official website



This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0
International License



Erasmus+

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Therapy 2.0 Partnership

Germany		media k GmbH (Koordinator) Dr. Karin Drda-Kühn / Hans-Jürgen Köttner • Therapy2.0@media-k.eu • + 49 7931 99 27 30
Germany		Innovation in Learning Institute – University of Erlangen-Nuremberg Evelyn Schlenk • Evelyn.Schlenk@ili.fau.de • + 49 9131 856 1111
Slovenia		Integra Institut, Institut za razvoj clovekovih potentialov Sonja Bercko Eisenreich • sonja.bercko@eu-integra.eu • + 38 659 013 2641
Croatia		Sveuciliste u Rijeci, Medicinski Fakultet Dr. Tanja Franciskovic / Dr. Marina Crepulja • tanja.franciskovic@medri.uniri.hr • + 38 591 2000 000
Iceland		Iceland Academy of the Arts Björg Jóna Birgisdóttir • bjorg@lhi.is • + 354 552 4000
Austria		Wissenschaftsinitiative Niederösterreich Dr. Wolfgang Eisenreich • office@wissenschaftsinitiative.at • + 43 676 944 5447
Portugal		Instituto Politecnico do Porto Dr. Regina Silva • ras@eu.ipp.pt • + 351 222 061
Greece		GUnet Akadimaiko Diadiktyo Pantelis Balaouras / Constantinos Tsibanis • costas@noc.uoa.gr • + 30 210 7275603

End of module



Congratulations!

You have completed this module!