**Online Counselling Agreement and Assessment form**

About me:

Hello, my name is Rebekah Golds-Jones. Thank you for taking the time to read and complete this document.

I am a Psychotherapeutic Counsellor and Certified EMDR Therapist, and am a member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), as well as an accredited member of the National Counselling Society (NCS). I have been in counselling practice since 2015, having worked as a senior nurse within acute mental health services for over 27 years. I am a trained Mindful Meditation Instructor with 8 years of experience in providing relaxation and Mindfulness programmes to both individual clients and groups.

As a counsellor, I work within the BACP ‘Ethical Framework for Counsellors’, The NCS ‘Code of Ethical Practice’ and also the BACP Guidelines for Online Counselling and Psychotherapy and receive weekly clinical supervision from a Consultant Psychiatrist / Medical Psychotherapist. Information relating to both BACP documents can be found at: [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk). Information relating to the NCS ‘Code of Ethical Practice’ can be found at: <https://www.nationalcounsellingsociety.org/help/have-a-concern/code-of-ethics>

I am a qualified and experienced counsellor with 5 years of face to face counselling practice experience and a growing amount of experience in online counselling, having commenced working with an online organisation in the summer of 2019. I mainly work in private practice offering both face to face counselling and online counselling, as well as for a well-known organisation offering online counselling. In addition, I teach students on their introductory counselling skills courses, and clinically supervise final year trainee counsellors. I have worked with a range of clients from age 16 up to and beyond retirement, in relation to a wide range of life, wellbeing and mental health difficulties.

I particularly specialise in working with serving and retired 999 staff and have worked extensively with both police and ambulance personnel with a variety of needs, including stress, bereavement, relationship breakdown, trauma and addiction. I offer a reduced fee scheme for all emergency personnel.

No matter who my client is, I have the fullest commitment to offering a service which is welcoming to people of all backgrounds in a supportive and non-discriminatory manner.

What is Online Counselling?

Online counselling provides an opportunity for you to focus upon developing and improving your quality of life, and explore any problems and difficulties, whatever they may be caused by in a confidential and supportive environment. Sometimes this can include expressing feelings that are painful, and which many of us experience at different times in our lives. Online counselling gives you the opportunity to access counselling support at a time, in a place and using a medium which is convenient to you.

Online counselling can provide support for a broad range of personal difficulties however there are occasions where it would not be considered suitable, for example, where a client is at risk of harm or when ‘dissociative episodes’ occur. If this is the case for you either when applying for support, or during ongoing sessions I will offer you information of some alternative sources of support, which you can make contact with and request support from.

What sort of issues can I contact you about?

Online counselling may be able to help with a very wide range of issues including: experiences of abuse; anxiety; life or work stresses; depression or low mood; eating difficulties; loneliness; relationship problems; bereavement; self-esteem; sexual orientation; chronic illness; bullying; discrimination and many more.

Sadly not all types of issues can be resolved through online counselling, and therefore I will advise you if face to face counselling, or another form of support, might be more suitable for you. Wherever possible I will make every effort to assist you in a referral to a suitable alternative source of assistance.

It is not possible for me to provide online counselling to anyone who is under the age of 18, or for anyone who is in mental health crisis. If this applies to you, I can help with information or referral to other agencies providing face to face counselling services who offer crisis support, or if you are under 18, to online services which are specifically directed to a younger age group.

What does the service offer?

At the point of our initial contact, we will agree an ‘appointment time’, either via email, IM, voice only or webcam.

If via email therapy, the appointment time will be when you will receive my email reply via Protonmail (which is a secure and encrypted online platform used for online counselling). This could be weekly or more frequently if you request this. As I will need some time to read your previous email I will need you to send in your therapy email at least 48 hours before I send you my reply. You would need to set up your own Protonmail account prior to your initial assessment appointment. Protonmail is secure and fully encrypted and available at: [www.protonmail.com](http://www.protonmail.com) My protonmail address is welcometosteppingstones@protonmail.com

For IM sessions, we will access VSee, which requires you to download this programme either to your laptop or phone and form an account in order that we can meet. VSee is a fully secure, encrypted platform which is safe for contact.

For voice only or webcam sessions we will access Zoom, which does not require you to download any software. I will send you a meeting invitation via email prior to our session.

If for any reason we experience technical issues during a ‘real time’ appointment (IM, voice only or webcam) I will try to reconnect with you, but if this is not possible we will make contact via the agreed alternative, such as by phone or email.

Payment for your sessions

Session fees are currently £45.00 per counselling hour (50 min).

The initial appointment will include some further assessment questions to help my understanding of how I can help you find a way forward with what has brought you to counselling.

The Payment of £45.00 for your session is due a minimum of 24 hours prior to the appointment time, using the Paypal facility on my website: [www.welcometosteppingstones.co.uk](http://www.welcometosteppingstones.co.uk)

If you have made payment for a session but are unable to meet at the appointed time I will retain the fee for the session unless we have experienced a technological breakdown which prevents us meeting online or exchanging emails. In the event of this occurring we would discuss how to rearrange the scheduled appointment.

By using the paypal facility on my website you are covered by Paypal’s privacy policy:<https://www.paypal.com/uk/webapps/mpp/ua/privacy-full>

About the way I work

I will provide, to the best of my ability, online counselling sessions that endeavour to create a supportive, non-judgmental environment, in which you will be given time and space to understand and gain insight into what is troubling you. This process can foster growth and lead to positive change in your life however does not involve my giving advice to you.

There may be occasions where I ask questions about what you have stated on your application form, or during a therapy session, in order to gain a clearer view of your difficulty or to clarify a misunderstanding in our communication. You are completely free to ignore my questions and responses, or alternatively spend time between sessions exchanges reflecting upon them.

Of course, online counselling is different to face-to-face counselling as misunderstandings may occur due to a lack of usual facial expressions and tone of voice. It is therefore important for us both to feel comfortable enough to ask for clarification if we are unsure of something we say or refer to within our exchanges, in order to reduce the risk of this leading to a misunderstanding or rupture in the counselling relationship occurring.

Confidentiality, Security, and Data Protection

The content of your emails or online appointments will not be communicated with a third party except for the purposes of supervision of my work. In this instance, your identity will not be revealed as I will use a code to uniquely represent you, and the presenting issues are discussed in a general context, to help ensure I am working ethically and safely with clients.

I strongly recommend that as an online client you use an encrypted email server for sending and receiving email exchanges when engaging with counselling, as this helps to ensure that our communication will not be intercepted by a third party. A free and secure email provider is [www.protonmail.com](http://www.protonmail.com) as previously mentioned, along with my secure email address. All email contact would be via this email provider.

In respect of online counselling via email, SMS, and webcam the UK police force and other international government authorities can ask for access to an individual’s email account or synchronous messaging account where there is suspicion of illegal activities. On this basis I am not able to guarantee confidentiality in circumstances which lead to access being granted.

Where a complaint is made by a client to my professional body I reserve the right to breach confidentiality and to use my session notes in order to address any grievances which might occur within my counselling practice. Wherever possible you will be informed of this.

At the end of our counselling agreement copies of our exchanges will be stored securely offline for a period of 7 years and then destroyed by shredding after this time. I am a registered Data Controller and abide by the regulations imposed by such procedures. My registration number is: ZA438444. The procedures in this document have been compiled in relation to GDPR (General Data Privacy Regulations) and you are welcome to request a summary or full version of these procedures in relation to Stepping Stones Counselling and Psychotherapy at any stage.

What information is kept about me and who has access?

As the Data Controller I maintain and store brief notes relating to your sessions. I will not share this data with someone other than yourself, unless required by a court of law.

Under GDPR you have the right to request a copy of session records. Where requested by you these will be within 30 days in electronic format, Under GDPR you have the right to ask for records to be amended if you feel they are inaccurate. If you wish to ask for an amendment or if you raise objection to any data kept by me, such objection will be stored with the original session notes.

How is my information stored?

The client agreement /assessment form you are completing here and any brief session notes will be stored on an encrypted memory stick which is password protected and stored in a locked cabinet. If required this is transported in a locked bag.

Any electronic contact we have during the process of assessment and ongoing sessions will be deleted from my computer at the end of our agreed work together.

Please indicate if you give your consent for me to maintain these records under the conditions described above **YES / NO**

My website is hosted by a company called Vistaprint, who adhere to the requirements of GDPR.

Guidelines for Emergency Contact

Online counselling **cannot** provide an emergency service for clients.

In the event of an emergency arising whilst you are engaged in online work or if you were experiencing suicidal thoughts, I would discuss with you the appropriate support that you could access during this period.

If you found yourself in a major crisis and were considering serious self-harm it would be vital to get immediate help. This could include contacting your GP, attending your nearest accident and emergency service (A & E) or calling 999.

You could also call the Samaritans on: 116 123 or email their emergency support on: jo@samaritans.org . All personal information disclosed will be kept confidential and not used for any purposes other than a counselling record.

This agreement shall be construed and governed in all respects in accordance with the laws of England and Wales and any dispute or differences in relation to this agreement shall be subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the English Courts.

**The details requested below, in respect of your GP and home address are taken in the event that I need to ask your permission to secure additional support for you.**

**The question regarding serious self-harm also addresses safety, as I need to gather this information to help assess if online counselling is suitable as support for the issues you would like to bring to your sessions.**

**GAD-7**

**Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?**

**0 =not at all**

**1=several days**

**2=more than half the days**

**3 =nearly every day**

**1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge 0 1 2 3**

**2. Not being able to stop or control worrying 0 1 2 3**

**3. Worrying too much about different things 0 1 2 3**

**4. Trouble relaxing 0 1 2 3**

**5. Being so restless that it is hard to sit still 0 1 2 3**

**6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable 0 1 2 3**

**7. Feeling afraid as if something awful may happen 0 1 2 3**

**GAD-7 total score =**

**PHQ-9**

**Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?**

**0=not at all**

**1=several days**

**2=more than half the days**

**3=nearly every day**

**1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things 0 1 2 3**

**2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless 0 1 2 3**

**3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much 0 1 2 3**

**4. Feeling tired or having little energy 0 1 2 3**

**5. Poor appetite or overeating 0 1 2 3**

**6. Feeling bad about yourself — or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down 0 1 2 3**

**7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television 0 1 2 3**

**8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite — being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual 0 1 2 3**

**9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way 0 1 2 3**

**PHQ-9 total score:**

**Please complete the following information below and return the agreement to me as an attachment if you would like to proceed with online counselling:**

**Full name:**

**Address:**

**Date of Birth:**

**Emergency contact number (in the event of technology breakdown which disrupts a counselling appointment):**

**GP Name and Address:**

**Are you seeking online counselling via email, IM (instant messenging), voice only or webcam?**

**Please briefly indicate your main reason for seeking therapeutic sessions:**

**Please ‘sign electronically’ here with your name if you agree to the general and GDPR points within this agreement (including data storage procedures mentioned):**

**……………………………………..**

**Please return this form via my secure email** **welcometosteppingstones@protonmail.com**

**With warmest wishes,**

**Rebekah**

**Rebekah Golds-Jones MBACP, MNCS (accred), ACTO Approved Online Therapist**

**Psychotherapeutic Counsellor, Certified EMDR Therapist**

**Founder of Stepping Stones**

**Stepping Stones Counselling and Psychotherapy**