

**ACTIVITY:** Online counselling services

# Providing adjunct support for online services

This activity will outline some ways in which you can tailor support to young people you work with in face-to-face settings, as you provide a supported referral to an online counselling service.

## Referral considerations

As with all referrals you make, it is important to ascertain the scope of the support that a service or program can provide a young person.

While a 'service visit' may not be applicable with online services (although some provide face-to-face training for the use of their online support service), consider the following questions:

- Does the site accessed provide a clear message about the type of service they offer and its availability?

*Some online counselling services are only staffed to respond to messages or chat during specific hours. When referring a young person, ensure you communicate the times when they can access the service.*

- Does the service offer free support or is it fee-for-service?

*Some counselling services are fee-for service, and currently there is no Medicare rebate (as part of a Mental Health Plan) for their use. In the case of free services, check to see if they specify any eligibility criteria or if they require the young person to disclose identity.*

- Does the service provide a 'user guide' for professionals to refer to?

*Many online counselling services provide clear user guides and user agreements for young people accessing the service, as well as professionals who refer to the online service. Check to see their availability.*



- Does the service provide professional or peer-trained counselling?

*Many online counselling services are supported by professionals or by trained peers (i.e. someone who is a trained volunteer or someone who has personal experience of a mental health issue who has been trained to support others). Find out how the service is staffed so you can consider this with the young person when deciding if the service is the right one for them.*

- Does the service provide a list of alternative or crisis services?

*Many online counselling services are aware that young people can access their service during periods of crisis or risk. Check to see if the online service offers the young person options for contact during crisis or high-risk times, and if they do not list them, highlight this when referring the young person.*

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- ▶ Does the service have any mechanisms for you to check what the service offers?

*Many online services provide email and/or phone contact details, so that you can clarify any questions you or the young person you are considering referring, may have.*

- ▶ Does the service have any accreditation, specify a therapeutic model, or list any of their outcomes measured?

*As an emerging practice methodology, many online counselling services gather outcomes measurement data to promote positive outcomes. Check their availability so you can convey, as part of your referral information you provide the young person, the positive impacts and the potential limitations of using the service. Some online services will highlight the accreditation or registration of the professionals who staff the service, or are part of a national research accreditation system - check for logos and registration numbers. Many online counselling services will specify the therapeutic model they use, which can be very helpful when discussing the option to refer with the young person you are working with.*

## Practice considerations

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Once a referral has been made, you can support a young person's access and progress in the these ways:

- ▶ Follow up on the referral with the young person and, if applicable or warranted, with the service provider.
- ▶ Allow the young person to bring any issues highlighted from the counselling process or any materials that they may be working on (such as worksheets and homework) into your sessions together, so you can reinforce any positive progress or respond to any questions.
- ▶ Show respect to the counselling space by asking if the young person wants to go into the content of the discussions they have with the counsellor/s, and highlight that unless they want to share specific issues, they can keep that process private (with the exception of high-risk issues). For other young people who provide shared consent, discuss the possibility of a support meeting, and allow the young person to set the agenda.
- ▶ As with all referrals to services, get feedback from young people you have referred so that you are better informed about how it can be of benefit to other young people you work with.

### Notes

*The Recommended counselling services section of ReachOut.com Professionals lists specific online counselling services. Use this guide to check to see how the services listed respond to the referral considerations when assessing which service is best suited to the young person you are working with.*

- ▶ [au.professionals.reachout.com/recommended-counselling-services](https://au.professionals.reachout.com/recommended-counselling-services)

