

# **Online counselling: A Key Component of 21st Century EAP In A Global Economy**

## **Key Features of Online Practice**



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*“Writing is a strong easement for perplexity... That is the reason for this journal. Everything is all connected up...the unaccustomed putting down of my own thoughts in black and white helped me to clarify them and find out my own aims and beliefs.”*  
(Emily Carr: Journals)

*“There is a special type of interpersonal empathy that is unique to text relationships. Some claim that text-only talk carries you past the distracting, superficial aspects of a person’s existence and connects you more directly to the other’s psyche.”* (Dr. John Suler)



## What is E-counselling?

- Any type of professional helping interaction that uses the Internet to connect client and helper
- Shepell-fgi EAP context: A short-term series of asynchronous email exchanges between counselor and client
- Rapport building is essential as it is in all other forms of counselling – client engagement comes first
- All exchanges are secure and encrypted to protect client confidentiality



# A Brief History of E-counselling

- One of the earliest distance communication technologies is written correspondence. Early accounts of therapy via mail are well-documented. Freud was an advocate of letter-based counselling.
- Since the advent of electronic communication, other distance technologies, principally the telephone, have been found to be effective for therapeutic service delivery.
- One of the earliest marriages of computers and counselling (1966) was a computerized 'therapist' named Eliza who became "the most famous computer program in clinical psychology."



## A Brief History of E-counselling, Cont'd.

- Online self-help support groups via email, bulletin boards, and real-time chat rooms were the precursor to e-therapy, and have existed since the 1980's.
- Earliest organized online advice service was '*Ask Uncle Ezra*' at Cornell University.
- Dr. Ivan Goldberg, MD, began a virtual 'private practice' fielding online questions about clinical depression in the early 1990's.
- For-profit 'e-clinics' were rapidly established in the mid-90's including [helphorizons.com](http://helphorizons.com); [mytherapynet.com](http://mytherapynet.com); [psychologyonline.co.uk](http://psychologyonline.co.uk).



## **Shepell·fgi E-counselling – Since 2000**

“Shepell·fgi E-counselling is a professional, confidential counselling service available directly through our website. The service allows you to connect with a counselor from any computer with Internet access. This short-term service is an effective means of addressing personal issues by means of letters to and from your E-Counselor. You can post messages at any time of the day or night, from anywhere in the world.”

<https://www.shepellfgiservices.com/ec/index1.asp>



# Clinical Limitations of E-counselling

- Suicidal or homicidal intent
- Domestic abuse/violence of any kind
- Risk to children – CAS reportable issues
- Severe addictions issues
- Psychotic episodes/psychiatric crises
- Crisis which requires immediate support (CAC)
- Non-literate clients (minimalists)



# Ethical Practice of E-counselling

- Informed consent
- Assessment and screening triage
- Confidential, not anonymous (contact info)
- Professional training and supervision
- Security and confidentiality (online records)
- Complex psychological or medical issues
- Scope of practice/crisis protocols

# Shepell·fgi E-counselling Registration

Shepell·fgi E-Counselling  
Private, one-on-one counselling over the Internet

[Login](#)

[Register for E-Counselling](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Feedback](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Shepell·fgi Home](#)



**Please note: E-**

**Counselling is not recommended for people who may be suicidal or are in the midst of a serious crisis. If this applies to you, the best thing for you to do is to get off the computer, pick up the phone and call the Shepell·fgi EAP hotline at 1-877-318-4472. Professional counselors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**

**QuoteCorner**

When one door of happiness closes another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened before us.

-Helen Keller

step 1

step 2

step 3

step 4

step 5

let's get started!



Check Your Eligibility

Shepell·fgi E-Counselling is available free of charge to all individuals who are eligible for Shepell·fgi E-Counselling as part of their EAP benefits. In order to ensure that individuals accessing E-Counselling are Shepell·fgi clients and eligible for this service, we require all users to complete a registration form.

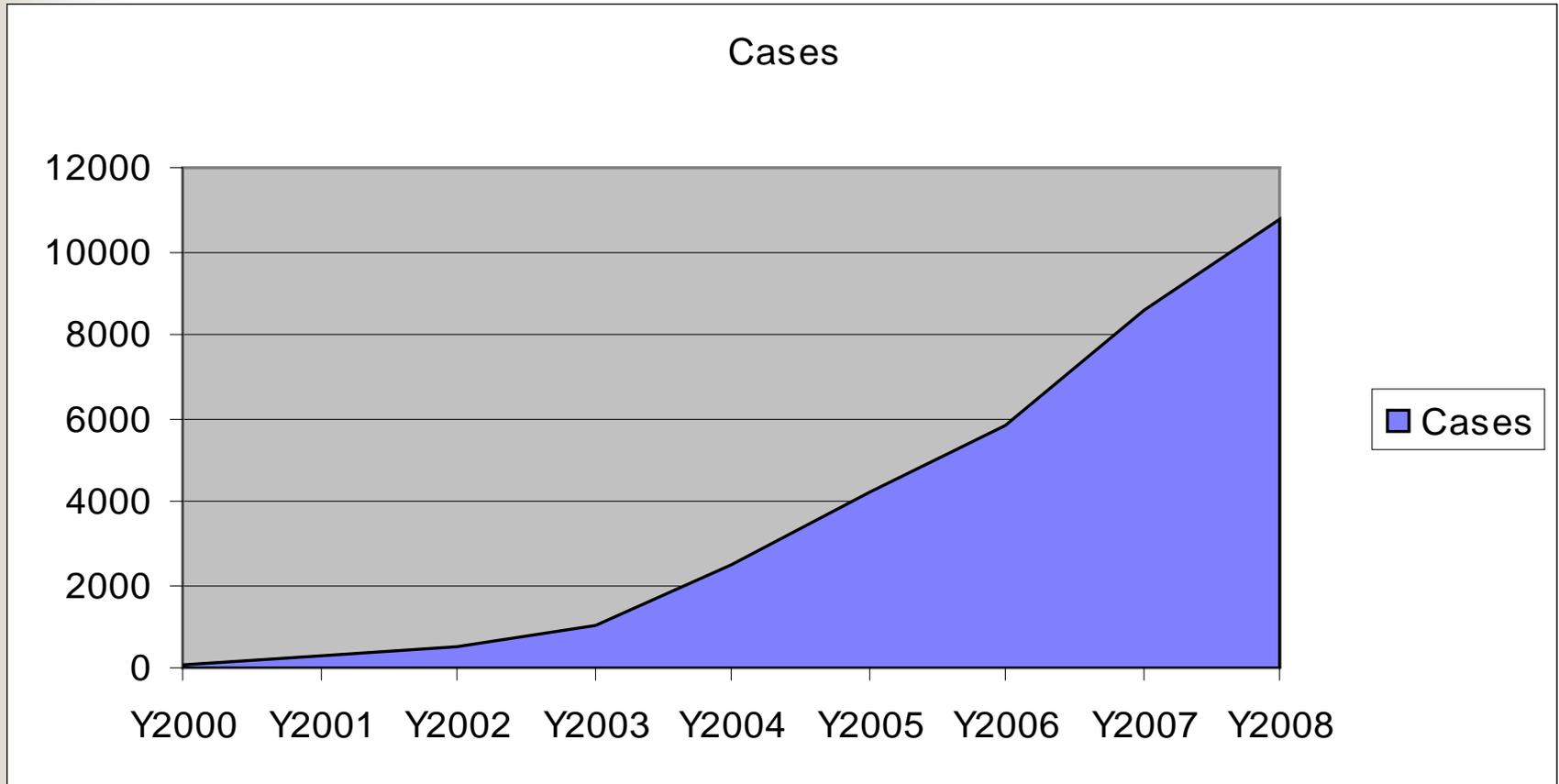
There are six simple steps to the registration procedure and accessing E-Counselling:

- Step 1: Accept terms and conditions
- Step 2: Set up your account
- Step 3: Complete the E-Counselling Registration Form
- Step 4: Compose your First Message to your E-Counsellor
- Step 5: Complete the Assessment

Enter your organization name below:

[Click here to check eligibility and proceed to Step 2](#)

# The EAP Client Online: Growth





# The **CARE<sup>2</sup>** Model of Short-Term E-counselling

## **C**onnect and contain

“Your problem is human and manageable.”

## **A**ssess and affirm

“You’ve got what it takes to get through this.”

## **R**eorient and reaffirm

“You are not defined by your life situation.”

## **E**ncourage and empower

“Keep going, one step at a time.”



## Convenience

- Access to professional counselling not restricted by geographical location or scheduling difficulties
- Clients are able to read and send messages any time of the day or night
- E-counselling client is not 'on the spot' in a session and does not have to 'keep up appearances'
- Diminished stigma regarding seeking help

## The EAP Client Online: Convenience

“E-counselling is the way to go! ... Don't have to feel awkward, don't have to make an appointment (take time off), very convenient – I type at the comfort of my room. It felt like I had an instant friend, just knowing someone's there listening made me feel relieved!”

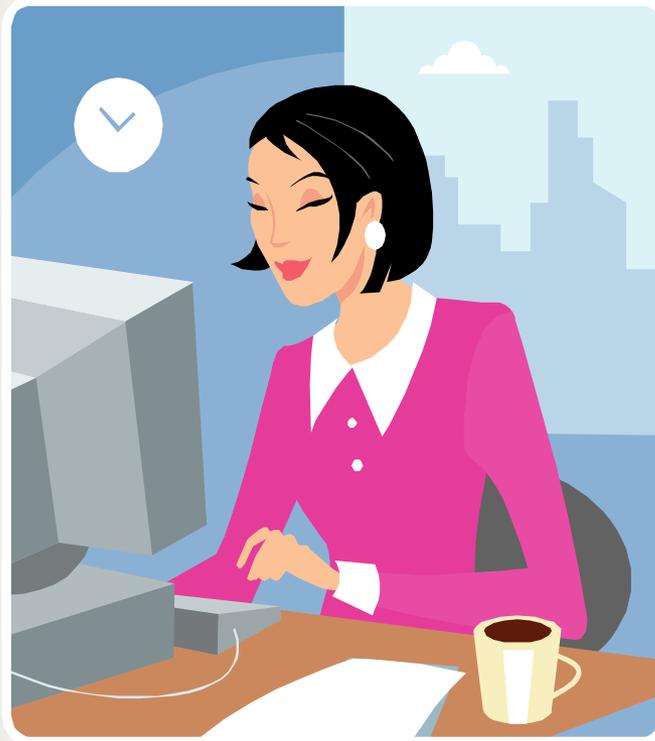




## Time to Reflect

- E-counselling offers clear boundaries and a way to contain the problem while new associations and insights arise
- Writing helps some people to focus feelings and can speed resolutions by ‘seeing it in print’
- The very process of composing, re-reading and re-wording e-mails increases self-awareness

## The EAP Client Online: Time to Reflect



“One reason E counselling appealed to me is that I can take the time to reread and digest the guidance. So often when I am talking to someone, I come away retaining only a small percent of the thoughts that were exchanged.”



## Words to Hold Onto

- Clients print out the E-counselor's messages and carry them around, re-reading and referring to them later
- Both problems and solutions are externalized in a shared space (co-authored text). At the same time the client internalizes an empathic listener.

“My voice will go with you...” (Sidney Rosen)
- The record of correspondence is another way to witness personal progress

## The EAP Client Online: Words to Hold Onto



“I have printed off every written word we shared and I can't tell you how many times I have gone back to those letters. I carry them with me everywhere. They inspire me. ... I have never and probably will never meet my E-counselor face to face but I feel a bond with him now that never seemed possible with an on-line relationship.”



## Disinhibiting Effect

- No need to 'save face'. Clients cut to the chase of their core issues.
- Writing about the issue offers more control over the pace, rhythm and content of self-disclosure. Client is in control of the send button.
- Medium reduces the stress of self-consciousness and frees the psyche
- No 'static of personality' in the room

# The EAP Client Online: Disinhibiting Effect



“I'm so much more comfortable when I can email people or chat online with them than being on the phone or in person. I find it easier to express myself because I don't feel judged or on the spot. Sometimes in person I feel uncomfortable in my skin and then start to analyze: Do I look ok? Are my clothes fashionable? Is my hair ok? Am I acting like an idiot? Am I laughing too much for no reason? Do my opinions make sense? But on the computer I don't feel like that at all.”



## Key Online Experiences

- No scheduling restrictions (time zone flexibility)
- Wealth of online resources
- Specialists available for peer consultation or referral without geographical restrictions
- Clear boundaries - safety and containment
- ‘Cut to the chase’ issue identification
- Both client and counselor enter the ‘*zone of reflection*’

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- When consciously used, the medium teaches focusing, witnessing, and '*mindful awareness*'
  - Co-architect effect; power differential diminished
  - Counselor accountability enhanced through written records
  - Both client and counselor can read/review at their own pace
  - Socially conditioned power of the written word
  - Absence of f2f cues allows a window into the client's thought process (self-talk)

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- Text-based bonding - high degree of intimacy and honesty from the 1st exchange
  - Interpersonal empathy unique to text relationships
  - Tele-presence, transparency and the 'transitional object'
  - Persona bypass – no social masks to remove – no 'threat of the furrowed brow'
  - Creative use of metaphor and text-based role-playing
  - Issue externalized/helper internalized

# The EAP Client Online: The Effectiveness

“I had no idea it was possible to form a bond and a trust with someone based solely on the written word. Thoughts and feelings just seemed to flow out of me in a way I never could have imagined ... I actually find myself missing his words and thoughts. Thankfully, I have past correspondences to rely on. I was apprehensive about trying E-counselling but find it was the best move I ever made.”



# The EAP Client Online: The Appeal

“I have to admit that I was a bit skeptical at first. At the time I couldn't see how this was possible and worried that this was another pop psychology answer to our instant oatmeal society. But I decided that I didn't have anything to lose ... I was able to share thoughts and feelings with him that I know I wouldn't have dared expressed in a face-to-face session. It was really like writing to an old friend. A really wise friend who knows when to challenge you and when to support you.”



# Client Perception of Therapeutic Benefit

“I find the process of writing in these InnerView sessions a form of healing. Emotions transform when I key events onto this screen and I begin to ‘awaken’ from a self-absorbed or selfish state. Thank you for being on the other side of these notes. Looking forward to your inner views.”

