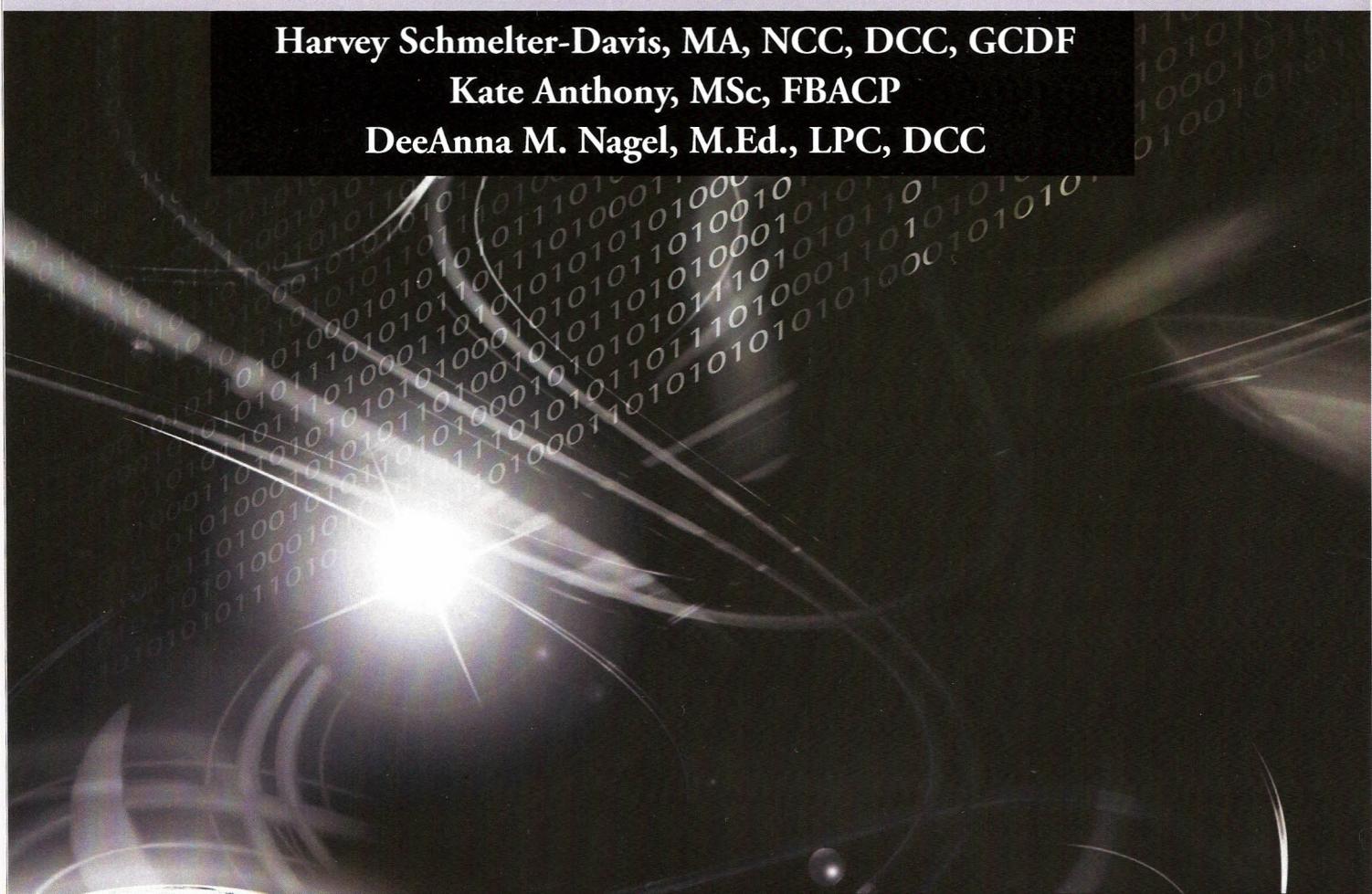


Using Technology to Deliver Career and School Guidance Services: Establishing a Global and Inclusive Ethical Framework

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Abstract

Many career and school guidance practitioners deliver services via technology in private practice and/or student assistance programs (SAPs) and organization settings in addition to traditional face-to-face help. While some guidelines and codes of ethics currently address the ethical use of technology in career and school settings (ACA, 2005a) the guidelines are not comprehensive and are not updated quickly. With this as context, an ethical framework should exist that is easy to update with sensitivity to new technologies and platforms as well as geographic and cultural issues. The framework should strive to offer a best standard of practice that all career and school guidance practitioners can easily adhere to regardless of particular professional identity, region and/or organization affiliation. Confidentiality, for instance, is the cornerstone of any successful student assistance program (Fleming, 2009) and certainly is one of the guiding principles of the helping professions. The following is a model of best practice currently available to the career and school guidance practitioner.

Sources for the framework below come from the Online Therapy Institute's Ethical Framework for the Use of Technology in Mental Health (Nagel & Anthony, 2009), the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC, 2001), the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2004), the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2005b), the National Career Development Association (NCDA, 2007), and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (Anthony & Goss, 2009).

Ethical Framework for the Use of Technology for Career and School Guidance Practitioners

Competent career and school guidance professionals using technology as part of their practice will always adhere at least to the following minimum best practices and standards to be considered working in an ethical manner.

Career and school guidance practitioners' relationship to existing professional ethical and best practices standards and licensing.

Practitioners must adhere to their existing licensing and certification ethical and best practices standards. The ethical framework in this document embodies existing licensing, certification and professional organization standards. Additional recommendations are made based on new technological developments.

Career and school guidance practitioners have a sufficient understanding of technology.

Technology basics are required for career and school guidance practitioners who choose to deliver services via technology. Career and school guidance practitioners must be current in relation to using secure technology and ethical standards (i.e. electronic or computer technology, cell and land line telephone, answering machines, facsimiles, television) to ensure the confidentiality of all transactions related to the client.

Practitioners will possess a basic understanding of technology as it relates to delivery of services:

- **Encryption:** They understand how to access encrypted services to store records and deliver communication. Records can be hosted on a secure server with a third-party, stored on the career and school guidance practitioner's hard drive utilizing encrypted folders or stored on an external drive that is safely stored.
- **Backup systems:** Records and data that are stored on the practitioner's hard drive are backed up either to an external drive or remotely via the internet.
- **Password protection:** They take further steps to ensure confidentiality of therapeutic communication and other materials by password protecting the computer,

drives and stored files or communication websites.

- **Firewalls:** They utilize firewall protection externally or through web-based programs.
- **Virus protection:** They protect work computers from viruses that can be received from or transmitted to others, including clients.
- **Hardware:** They understand the basic running platform of the work computer and know whether or not a client's hardware/platform is compatible with any communication programs the career and school guidance practitioners uses.
- **Software:** They know how to download and operate software and assist clients with the same when necessary to the delivery of services.
- **Security updates:** They utilize security software that incorporates frequent security updates to protect the confidentiality of client interactions.
- **Third-party services:** They utilize third-party services that offer an address and phone number so that contact is possible via means other than email. This offers a modicum of trust in the third-party utilized for such services as backup, storage, virus protection and communication.

Career and school guidance practitioners work within their scope of practice.

"Scope of practice" indicates the specific area to which a career and school guidance practitioner may practice. Scope of practice in many geographic areas also defines where practitioners may practice; whether he or she may practice across various geographical boundaries and within what parameters one may practice. Career and school guidance practitioners also follow local and regional laws and codes of ethics as applicable.

- **Understanding of boundaries and limitations of one's specific discipline:** They understand which assessments and interventions are allowed within their specific discipline. For instance, practitioners who have no training in psychotherapy generally do not provide these services.
- **Understanding of specific laws or ethics within one's own discipline or geographic location:** They understand the limits set forth by laws or ethics within the applicable geographic location. For instance, Licensed Professional Counselors trained in career and school guidance need to seek assistance as to what limitations their licensing board has established to provide career counseling across state lines. Certain states dictate what they can be called due to the implementation of Title laws. Practice laws

Continued on page 28

may prevent a licensed career and school guidance practitioner from interpreting certain tests in one state, yet the same practice may be accepted under practice law in another state.

- **Respect for the specific laws of a potential client's geographic location:** They understand that different geographic regions may offer additional limits to practice.

Career and school guidance practitioners seek out training, knowledge and supervision.

Training, knowledge and supervision regarding career and school guidance and technology is paramount to delivering services that is considered "best practice." Career and school guidance practitioners are encouraged to demonstrate proficiency and competency through formal specialist training for the use of technology in providing career and school guidance services. Peer supervision and support is recommended for practitioners who cannot practice independently within a geographic region and is highly recommended for all clinicians.

- **Formal training:** Career and school guidance practitioners seek out sufficient formal training, whenever possible through college, university or private settings that can satisfy certification and/or licensing requirements. Formal training and credentials are displayed on the practitioner's website.
- **Professional development training:** They seek out continuing education and professional development and conferences, conventions and workshops.
- **Peer-reviewed literature:** They read peer-reviewed literature that includes the latest theories and research.
- **Popular media:** They are informed through popular media such as magazines, newspapers, social networking sites, websites, television and movies and understand the impact providing career and school guidance services.
- **Peer supervision:** They seek supervision whenever they cannot practice independently within their geographic location. All career and school guidance practitioners who deliver services via technology seek supervision.

Example topics of study related to training, knowledge and supervision (not an exhaustive list):

- Online Career Counseling, Career Information, and Job Search
- Online Supervision and Peer Supervision
- Online Assessment Instruments Administration and Interpretation

- Telephone and Avatar Counseling
- Cyberpsychology
- Text-based and Chat Counseling
- Telecounseling
- Blogging
- Online Relationships and Peer Support
- Online Assessment in Second Life
- Using Twitter (tweeting)
- SMS Text Messaging
- Virtual Worlds
- Career Counseling and Technology
- Web Development and Reliability

Career and school guidance practitioners display pertinent and necessary information on websites.

Websites provide access to information for the general public, potential clients, clients and other professionals.

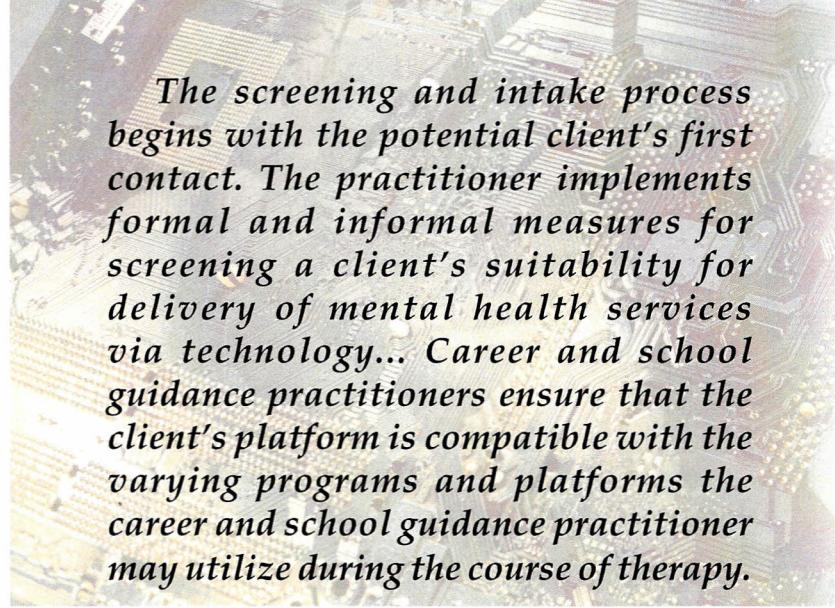
- **Career, school and personal crisis intervention information:** People from anywhere in the world may surf the internet seeking immediate help. Career and school guidance practitioners display crisis intervention information on the home page. Offering global resources such as Befrienders International, The Samaritans and/or how to reach a specific country's career information and crisis intervention web resources is the best course of action.
- **Career and school guidance practitioners' contact information:** Career and school guidance practitioners offer contact information that includes email, postal address and a telephone or VOIP number. While it is not recommended that postal addresses reflect the practitioner's home location, clients should have a postal address for formal correspondence related to redress, subpoenas or other mailings requiring a signature of receipt. Career and school guidance practitioners state the amount of time an individual may wait for a reply to email or voicemail. Best practice indicates a maximum of two business days for inquiries.
- **Career and school guidance practitioners' education, license and/or certification information:** Practitioners list degrees, licenses and/or certifications as well as corresponding numbers. If the license, certification board, or professional body offers a website that allows the general public to verify information on a particular career and school guidance practitioners the license and certification listings should link directly to those verifying body websites. Career and school guidance practitioners consider listing other formal education such as college or university courses, online continuing education and professional development courses, and conference/convention attendance directly related to

- mental health and technology.
- **Terms of use and privacy policy:** Terms of use, often all or in part, synonymous with a career and school guidance practitioner's informed consent, is available on the website either as a page on the website or a downloadable document. The privacy policy is also available in the same way and offers information about if or how email addresses, credit card information and client records are used, shared or stored. Career and school guidance practitioners must ensure that they comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act and other aspects of applicable law, and in the United States, they display the Notice of Privacy Practices to indicate compliance with HIPAA and FERPA. Applicable information regarding privacy and confidentiality that are required for client consent in the geographic location of the career and school guidance practitioners should be posted on the website as well.
- **Encrypted transmission of therapeutic and payment information:** Practitioners offer secure and encrypted means of therapeutic communication and payment transactions. Email and chat programs, whether embedded within their site or utilizing third party platforms, are explained on the site. Payment methods are explained as well through merchant information or information provided by the career and school guidance practitioners.

Career and school guidance practitioners conduct an initial intake and screening process.

The screening and intake process begins with the potential client's first contact. The practitioner implements formal and informal measures for screening a client's suitability for delivery of mental health services via technology.

- **Client's technology skills:** Practitioners screen potential client's use of technology through questions at the outset. Questions include but are not limited to an inquiry about the client's experience with online culture, e.g. email, chat rooms, forums, blogging, social networks, instant messaging and online purchasing, mobile texting, VOIP or telephones. Career and school guidance practitioners ensure that the client's platform is compatible with the varying programs and platforms the career and school guidance practitioner may utilize during the course of therapy.
- **Client's language skills:** Practitioners screen for language skills from the initial contact through the first few exchanges. Assessing for language barriers,



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reading and comprehension skills, as well as cultural differences, is part of the screening process. Text-based career and school guidance services may also involve screening for keyboarding proficiency.

- **Presenting issue, client identity and clinical concerns:** Practitioners screen to ensure the presenting issue is within the scope of practice and knowledge base of the practitioner. Intake screening should assess the degree of personal crises in addition to career and school guidance issues to determine that a possible immediate crisis are formally addressed through an intake questionnaire or first exchange. Practitioners incorporate a mechanism for verifying identity of clients by asking for a formal identification number such as driver's license, school ID or other satisfactory method. The client must not be anonymous, offering at a minimum: first and last name, home address, and phone number for emergency contact. Minors must be identified as applicable through parental consent and FERPA confidentiality policies must be followed.

Administration and Interpretation of Online Assessment Instruments

Assessments instruments when used must follow ethical practices for the administration and interpretation of these instruments. When offering these assessments online career and school guidance practitioners should adhere to the following:

- **Training and knowledge:** Practitioners are trained in the specific assessment instrument including application for online use.
- **Applicability for online use:** Practitioners review the assessment instrument technical manual to determine if the instrument has been researched for online use.
- **Administration and interpretation:** Practitioners

Continued on page 30

Continued from page 29

- review the technical manual recommendations to administer and interpret assessment using technology.
- **Client referral:** Clients should be referred to a competent professional to provide face-to-face assessment interpretation if there is evidence that the client does not understand the assessment results.

Referral

There may be a number of reasons to refer a client for face-to-face counseling:

- **Client technology access:** A client may not have access to appropriate secure technology.
- **Client technology competence:** It is determined that the client would not be able to benefit from technology counseling applications. The career and school guidance practitioners will provide information how to receive face-to-face counseling services in their geographic area.
- **Referral resources:** Clients may be recommended to use national resources such as the United Way 211 resource line, One-Stop Career Centers, or Befrienders.

Use of Web Career Counseling Resources

Career and school guidance practitioners should have confidence in the value of the web sites that are being recommended for clients. This includes:

- **Criteria to recommend a web resource:** Practitioners should use the web review standards such as those of the National Career Development Association, Association of Computer-based Career Information Systems and the Web Accessibility Initiative.
- **Source and currency:** Practitioners should be confident in the source and currency of the web information and know the strengths and limitations of the information. Web sites should include information how often the data is updated and the source of the information. Typically, those career web sites recommended by professional and government organizations can be the most useful.
- **Job posting information:** Job posting web sites should include how long the posting has been on the site and how the information is updated. All job posting information should adhere to all applicable laws.

Continued on page 32



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Continued from page 30

Career and School Guidance Practitioners Offer an Informed Consent Process.

The informed consent process begins when the client contemplates accessing services. Therefore, clear and precise information is accessible via the practitioner's website. The informed consent process includes a formal acknowledgement from the client to career and school guidance practitioners. This acknowledgement is received via encrypted channels. Informed consent content is revisited during the course of career counseling as necessary and beneficial.

The possible advantages and disadvantages of the use of technology in providing career and school guidance services should be discussed within the informed consent process: Information is disseminated about the pros and cons of the use of technology including such disadvantages as lack of visual and auditory cues and the limitations of confidentiality via technology, and advantages that include easy scheduling, time management and reduced transportation costs.

Confidentiality and Technology Encryption:

An explanation about the use of encryption for therapeutic exchanges and lack of encryption if/when unencrypted methods are used for issues such as appointment changes and cancellations.

- **Career and school guidance practitioners as “owner of the record:”** Unless otherwise specified through law in the practitioner's geographic location, the practitioner remains the owner of the service record including all transcripts, notes and emails. The client is informed that posting direct information about the counselor or verbatim information from sessions is prohibited.
- **File storage procedures:** The client is informed about how records are stored and for how long the records are maintained. All procedures conform to the standards laid down in applicable law and as required by any relevant authority (such as professional body) and, at least, include encryption and password protection and a commitment to destroy all records after a given period as required by law/regulation/best practice.
- **Privacy policy:** The practitioner's privacy policy is also included in the informed consent process including information about how email addresses, credit card information and client records are used, shared or stored. In the United States, practitioners must include, when applicable, the Notice of Privacy Practices to indicate compliance with HIPAA and FERPA. Applicable information regarding privacy and

confidentiality that are required for patient consent in the geographic location of the practitioners are included in the informed consent process.

Other Informed Consent Issues

- **Career and school guidance practitioner's geographical jurisdiction:** The physical location of the practitioners is offered in the informed consent and if the career and school guidance practitioner is licensed within a specific jurisdiction, the informed consent states client understands services are rendered under the laws or jurisdiction of the relevant country, state or region.
- **How to proceed during a technology breakdown:** The client is informed about how to proceed if a technology breakdown occurs during a session.
- **Emergency contact:** Practitioners offer specific information about who to contact in case of an emergency and set specific rules about emergency emails that the practitioners may not be privy to (e.g. threatening posts on a support forum). Practitioners research local resources within the client's geographic area as emergency backup resources.
- **Cultural specifics that may impact counseling:** Practitioners discuss varying time zones, cultural differences and language barriers that may impact the delivery of services. Practitioners should also ensure at or prior to the start of services that the client's expectations of the service being offered is sufficiently close to their own understanding and should take into account that different cultures can have very different understandings of these matters.
- **Dual relationships:** Practitioners discuss with clients the expected boundaries and expectations about forming relationships online. Practitioners inform clients that any requests for “friendship,” business contacts, direct or @replies, blog responses or requests for a blog response within social media sites will be ignored to preserve the integrity of the helping relationship and protect confidentiality. If the client has not been formally informed of these boundaries prior to the practitioners receiving the request, the practitioner will ignore the request via the social media site and explain why in subsequent interaction with the client.
- **Insurance, subsidy or reimbursement information:** If the client resides in a geographic area that generally accepts insurance or other forms of reimbursement for services, the practitioner informs the client of this information. Conversely, services delivered via technologies that are not covered at all or at the

Continued on page 34

Continued from page 32

same rate, the practitioner informs the client of this information also.

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This ethical framework offers a workable and flexible model that can change with the career counseling and school guidance professions. For regions around the world that currently have no established guidelines or codes of ethics with regard to the use of technology and the delivery of career and school guidance services, this framework offers the practitioner a baseline for service delivery. The framework protects clients and students as well, assuring that any practitioner using this framework has the best interests of the client in mind while providing quality services.

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Harvey Schmelter-Davis, M.A., NCC, DCC, GCDF is a Career and Workforce Development Specialist. He has been involved in the use of technology and counseling since the 1980s and currently trains counselors, coaches and facilitators to use technology to provide services to their clients. The training, offered through ReadyMinds, leads to one of two national credentials, Distance Credentialed Counselor or Distance Credentialed Facilitator. These credentials are conferred by the Center for Credentialing and Education, an affiliate of the National Board for Certified Counselors. Prior to his work at ReadyMinds, he was the manager of the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee's (NOICC) Career Development Training Institute, Senior Practitioner-in-Residence at the Rutgers University, Heldrich Center for Workforce Development and the director of Career Services and International Education at Brookdale Community College, Lincroft, NJ.

Kate Anthony, MSc, FBACP, is the author of several articles on the use of email, bulletin boards, IRC, videoconferencing, stand-alone software and more radical innovative use of technology within therapeutic practice, such as virtual reality. As a member and Fellow of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (www.bacp.co.uk), she developed and co-authored Guidelines for Online Counselling and Psychotherapy, and Supervision (BACP, 2001), and is author of the second and third editions of "Guidelines" in 2005 and 2009 respectively. She presents at a national and international level at conferences and is co-editor with Dr. Stephen Goss of Technology in Counselling and Psychotherapy - A Practitioners' Guide (Palgrave, 2003). (www.ismho.org). Kate is currently working on her DPsyD doctorate with the Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University. Kate is co-author of the recent book: Therapy Online [a practical guide].

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