

TAC Guidelines on the Integration of Online and In-Person Training in Psychotherapy (Blended Learning)

1. Preamble

The term *blended learning* refers to an educational approach that combines the use of digital platforms with in-person training activities. This approach offers greater flexibility and can enhance access to training.

Training Accreditation Committee (TAC) reaffirms that **complete psychotherapy training must not be conducted exclusively through online platforms**. Psychotherapy education requires direct human interaction, experiential learning, and embodied presence, which cannot be replaced by online methods. Substantial in-person contact is necessary to ensure the integrity of professional standards and the development of essential psychotherapists' competences.

In accordance to this, on March 16th, 2024, in Vienna, the General Board Meeting adopted a policy stating that a **'100 percent online psychotherapy training programme wouldn't qualify for EAPTI status and the ECP award'**.

Therefore, online platforms should be utilized in a supplementary way to in-person training activities and under clearly defined conditions.

The following guidelines are intended to provide clear parameters for the integration of online and in-person training components of the psychotherapy training.

2. General Principles

- Online learning may **complement** but not **replace** in-person training.
- All online participation must be conducted **live and synchronous**, meaning that both the lecturer (or therapist/supervisor) and student (or trainee) are present at the same time, with the possibility for immediate two-way communication.
- **Recorded or pre-recorded sessions are not acceptable** as a substitute for direct teaching, therapy, or supervision.
- A **minimum proportion of in-person training** is required in each component of psychotherapy education.
- Training institutes must ensure that online provision is conducted through **secure, privacy-protected platforms** that guarantee confidentiality, data protection, and compliance with professional ethical standards.
- Training institutes must maintain **documentation** of all online activities or platforms utilised.

3. Blended Learning in Psychotherapy Training: Guidelines by Training Components

a. Therapy for trainees

- **Individual therapy for trainees** may be conducted online to a limited degree, with a normally 40% of sessions allowed through secure live video platforms. It is strongly recommended:
 - That therapy begins with direct face-to-face contact.
 - In-person sessions are distributed yearly throughout the course of therapy.
- **Group therapy for trainees** can be conducted through online platforms up to 20% maximum. The depth of interpersonal dynamics, group processes, and the therapist's embodied presence require in-person contact.

b. Theory and Methodology

- **Theoretical lectures**, whether non-interactive (*ex-cathedra*) or interactive in the sense of dialogue, questions, and answers (while remaining purely theoretical), may be delivered live through online platforms.
- **Methodology workshops**, also referred to as *skills training*, may be delivered online **up to a maximum of 30% normally, and only when absolutely necessary**. Any online methodology must remain fully interactive, live, and experiential, ensuring an equivalent quality of learning and supervision as in-person delivery.

c. Supervision

- **Individual supervision** may be conducted via secure live video platforms. Supervisor and trainee must meet in person at least once a year. Such direct contact is essential to building trust, accountability, and professional development.
- **Group supervision** may be partially conducted online under these conditions:
 - The group size should normally not exceed **5 participants**. This limit ensures sufficient depth of interaction, observation, and individualized feedback necessary for psychotherapy education
 - At least one annual in-person meeting with the supervisor is required.
 - Sessions must always be conducted live and synchronous; no recordings may substitute attendance.

d. Clinical work of trainees under supervision

- **Individual psychotherapy work with clients under supervision** may be conducted online only in exceptional cases, up to maximum of 20%. In case the training organization would allow online clinical work under supervision (max 20%), it is required to provide trainees with a special training for conducting psychotherapy in online format.
- **Group psychotherapy work of trainees under supervision** can be done through online platforms up to 20% maximum.

- Psychotherapy work with couples or families under supervision may be conducted online only in exceptional cases and up to a maximum of 20%. Supervisors must carefully assess the appropriateness of such format for each case, ensure additional ethical and technical safeguards, and provide guidance to maintain the quality and integrity of the therapeutic process.

e. Clinical Placement

- 100% must normally take place in live clinical settings.

4. Ethical and Quality Safeguards

- **Confidentiality:** All online sessions, including therapy, theoretical lectures, individual clinical work of trainees under supervision, and supervision, must be conducted on **secure, privacy-protected platforms**. Trainers, therapists, supervisors, and trainees must ensure that no unauthorized recording, sharing, or disclosure occurs, in accordance with professional ethical standards and data protection regulations.
- Online activities must comply with GDPR and data protection standards.
- Institutes must provide evaluation mechanisms for online learning (tests, reflective work, supervision logs).
- Institutes must report in their accreditation documentation the proportion of online training used and the measures taken to ensure quality.

5. Integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Clause

TAC recommends that an AI clause be added to the EAPTI Quality Standards. AI based or AI assisted tools may support theoretical or administrative aspects of training but must never replace direct human interaction, supervision, therapy, or experiential learning. Any AI software, tool, or app but must be comprehensively controlled by a fully qualified psychotherapist trainer, at all times. Institutes must ensure transparency, ethical use, data protection, and compliance with confidentiality and GDPR standards whenever AI tools are utilized.

6. Summary

Online platforms may provide valuable support for psychotherapy training, but they must only be used in a **live and synchronous** manner, with active two-way participation, on platforms that guarantee **confidentiality and data protection**, and always within strict limits. Direct, in-person contact remains the foundation of psychotherapy education and practice. TAC recommends that all psychotherapy training organisations adhere strictly to these guidelines to safeguard the quality, integrity, and ethical standards of psychotherapy training.

6. Exceptional Circumstances

In extraordinary situations such as war, armed conflict, or natural disasters, exceptions to the above rules may be considered. Any such exceptions must remain temporary, limited to the period of emergency, and applied with the utmost care to preserve the quality and integrity of psychotherapy training.

Any other exceptions or deviations from the above guidelines, including training elements, online participation, or contextual factors, **are to be reviewed and decided by TAC on a case-by-case basis.**