

Health and Safety Policy - Small Talk Therapy

Updated October 2024

Purpose

Small Talk Therapy is committed to ensuring the health and safety of its clients and workers (including all employees and contractors) and respecting the appropriate health and safety policies when working on site. We aim to preserve the long-term health of our workers and those we work with by demonstrating care, aroha, and concern. We strive to use planning and preparation to minimise risks, leadership and responsiveness to respond to incidents, and to learn as we go.

Overview and scope

At Small Talk Therapy, we aim to take reasonable precautions to promote the health and safety of our clients and workers as they carry out their duties. The nature of our community-based service means that we work in a wide range of settings including; our home offices or clinics, our clinic room, preschools, schools, community centres, residential care, client homes, and the wider community. When working at an institution, such as a school, we expect our workers to respect the sites health and safety procedures and use common sense. We reserve the right of our workers to protect their own health and safety. Workers are expected to sign in and read the site's health and safety policy if provided.

Risks

We work in everyday locations with similar levels of risk to health and safety as in everyday life in our region.

Key identified risks include:

- Risks of driving between work sites
- Infectious diseases when working with families, the public, and children
- Natural disasters, specifically earthquakes
- Stress and burnout related to working in an underfunded sector with infinite need
- Physical injuries related to children
- Physical injuries related to the work environment
- Physical risks of repetitive movements
- Visiting new sites that may have unexpected hazards
- Bullying and harassment
- Drugs and alcohol
- Workers being unable to communicate with their team when health or safety is compromised

Risk Management

Health and safety are everyone's responsibility within the organization. In addition to health and safety measures put in place by Small Talk Therapy, contractors should have their own health and safety policies. We expect people to use common sense and consider possible risks.

We plan for and manage the above risks as follows:

Infectious diseases (including Covid19)

- Small Talk Therapy will comply with government and NZSTA professional body Covid19 practice guidelines.
- Families are requested to advise us if anyone who attends sessions in person is or has recently been unwell.
- Should a potential serious infection occur, we notify all clients so they can manage their own risk.
- Workers clean all toys that have been mouthed by children. Cleaning products are made available at clinic sites and workers carry their own hand sanitizer which can be used to clean resources.

Driving between sites

- Drivers are expected to keep their cars in good working order. All vehicles used for Small Talk Therapy purposes must have a current warrant of fitness and registration.
- Seatbelts are to be always used and traffic laws adhered to.

Natural disasters, specifically earthquakes

- Workers are encouraged to visually scan for where to drop and cover in case of earthquake.

Stress and burnout

- Stress and burnout are a risk factor due to working in an underfunded sector with infinite need. Our numbers of incoming referrals are also variable, and as workers are paid according to the work completed, there is a risk of taking on too much work.
- All employees working with clients are provided professional supervision. Contractors are responsible for their own professional supervision, which they are encouraged to engage in regularly.
- Sick leave is monitored, and we review hours and stress levels. Contractors are encouraged to only take on additional tasks when they feel well and able and keen to do so.
- All employees are expected to take annual leave.
- All employees are expected to schedule meal and regular breaks during their work day in a way that works for their body and mind. Contractors manage their own working day.

Physical injuries related to children

- Children sometime throw objects, hit, bite and jump or climb on workers.
- Children may be injured during play with toys or therapy materials.
- We provide safer toys, such as lightweight and/or soft objects where we can.
- Workers are experienced in reading nonverbal signs of agitation, confusion, and other signs of possible aggression
- Workers are experienced in monitoring the physiological arousal levels of clients and strive to help clients stay in a well-regulated state

- De-escalation techniques are a key part of our clinical practice
- We use our years of experience with children and people with disabilities to help predict, plan, and react as safely as possible while maintaining a balance between risk prevention and clinical benefit.
- We ask primary carers who are present to help keep us safe by managing their child's unsafe behaviour.

Physical injuries related to the work environment

We use various I.T. equipment, often with multiple cables. Cables are placed where they can't be tripped over. Cables that are exposed are taped down.

We often work from home offices. Pets are a trip and fall hazard and workers need to be alert to where they are whilst working.

Workers often need to bring resources with them, such as toys and assessments. These can be heavy. Workers never lift anything beyond what they are comfortable with. We use boxes on wheels, suitcases with pulleys, and other tools to safely transport our materials.

Furniture in clinics sometimes needs to be shifted. Workers will arrange for colleagues to assist where needed and will not move furniture that is heavy for them.

Therapy materials are stored in cupboards, which can become cluttered. Items falling out may injure workers or clients. Workers will ensure heavier items are placed at knee to waist height to avoid injury if they fall. Workers are all responsible for ensuring cupboard clutter is kept to a minimum (through regular tidying and removal of excess items) to prevent items falling.

There is increased risk of slipping over on ground that is sloped and/or damp or where there are obstacles. Each clinic currently has measures in place (eg. iBod has placed anti-slip grips on the front door steps). As workers identify risks, they share these with the director so other workers can be alerted to these.

Ergonomics

- If we are working for more than 15 minutes using computer technology, we seek out an appropriate ergonomic set up
- When driving, pausing to stretch every 90 minutes is encouraged.
- Heavy items should be stored at knee to waist height, to ensure safer handling

Visiting new sites

- Workers are expected to monitor for potential hazards for themselves and the people around them whenever visiting a different site
- Workers are supported if they leave a site due to health or safety concerns
- When visiting client's homes, we ask if there is a dog on site and if it will be restrained when the worker arrives.
- Workers are supported if they need to minimise or avoid specific locations due to emotional hazards (i.e., abusive, threatening or bullying people), physical hazards (e.g., unexpected dangers at a person's home e.g. dangerous dogs, etc), or environmental hazards (e.g., second hand smoke, mold, unsecured poisons, allergens, etc).

Drugs and alcohol

- We recognize that drugs and alcohol, taken either by the worker, the client and/or the child's carer, can contribute to incidences, accidents and illness.
- Workers only carry out their work responsibilities when they are not under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Where there is suspicion that a client or carer may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, especially if there is the belief that their behaviour is likely to be unpredictable or dangerous, additional precautions are taken. Precautions include careful planning with the director and/or an experienced colleague around health and safety specific to that client. Where the workers safety cannot be assured, they should discontinue offering support for that client until it is agreed that all safety measures have been put in place.

Workers being unable to communicate with their team when health or safety is compromised

- Workers sometimes travel to isolated areas, work alone in buildings, and visit homes that are unfamiliar. Workers need to be able to be contacted and contactable at all times, to ensure immediate support if urgent situations arise
- Workers carry charged mobile phones so they can seek help and be contacted in the case of an emergency
- Workers are encouraged to carry phone numbers of who to contact in case of becoming stranded.
- Workers are encouraged to provide the Small Talk Therapy director and administrator with next of kin contact details, in case of emergency.
- Workers are requested to state their appointment address in Powerdiary 'notes'. If subcontracting to the Ministry of Education they should give their service manager or a trusted colleague details of where they will be and when, so they can be located and contacted in the case of an emergency.

We will achieve our Small Talk Therapy health and safety standards by:

- making health and safety a key part of our role
- doing everything reasonably possible to remove or reduce the risk of injury or illness
- making sure all incidents, injuries and near misses are recorded in the appropriate place
- investigating incidents, near misses and reducing the likelihood of them happening again
- having emergency plans and procedures in place where a need has been identified
- training everyone about hazards and risks so everyone can work safely
- providing appropriate induction, training and supervision as required for all new and existing workers
- helping workers who were injured or ill return to work safely.

All workers are encouraged to play a vital and responsible role in maintaining a safe and healthy workplace through:

- being involved in improving health and safety systems at work
- following all instructions, rules, procedures and safe ways of working
- reporting any pain or discomfort as soon as possible

Reporting procedures

Incidents are to be documented by workers on the “Incident form” and shared with Fiona and the administrator, who will arrange for the information to be stored and made available to Small Talk Therapy workers. The following details will be recorded by the worker:

- Date / Time
- Location
- Who was involved
- What happened
- Was it a near miss, incident, illness, etc
- What actions were taken at the time
- What needs to happen next (e.g., do we need to notify anyone?)
- Do we need to update procedures or policies.