



# ReLPAG

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## Press Release

### Mental Health Services During Lock Down.

1. Recognition of Lifelong Learning in Psychology Action Group (ReLPAG) commends and supports the efforts of government in its efforts to contain and flatten the curve in the fight against Covid-19.
2. In the same vein, ReLPAG expresses heartfelt sympathy to the family and friends of the first South African victim of this virus, a lady in the Western Cape. In her death was a message for us all. It brought the reality of Covid-19 home on the eve of Lock down, which in itself was a daunting and frightening experience for most, if not all.
3. ReLPAG acknowledges and empathizes deeply that the people's most fundamental needs are foremost at this time.
4. Lock down is not only unnerving but is a trigger bringing many repressed fears, worries, concerns and anxieties from the past to the fore. This is a worldwide phenomenon and more people than before will seek psychological help and counselling during this time and the aftermath of this virus. Lock down can however also be a trigger for resilience and solidarity that grow as time pass.
5. ReLPAG members welcome that mental health and psychological and counselling services are declared essential services. ReLPAG members are ready and willing to assist the communities in which they live and work. As mental health practitioners we also want to provide continuity of care, not just now, but as the process unfolds. Many practitioners also expressed their willingness to do work on a voluntary basis in addition to their existing work with their current client base. Those in need are invited to make use of this opportunity in this difficult time.
6. ReLPAG, as an organisation, is of the opinion services have to be delivered in a responsible way and therefore obtained the opinion of a senior advocate. The opinion obtained is succinct and clear and serves as a guideline for psychologists and registered counsellors and users of psychological services:

- Psychological and counselling services are essential services, but in spite of this the spirit of the Regulations is about preserving life by containing the spread of the contagious disease. Therefore, ReLPAG encourages practitioners and clients to restrict movement and limit outside contact.
  - Face- to- face contact would be appropriate only in highly exceptional circumstances. For those occasions it will be necessary for the practitioner to prove the extraordinary nature of the distress.
  - Furthermore, a permit has to be obtained to render this service within the context of the restrictions during Lock down.
  - The interpretation of what would be an emergency service and due distress is in the judgment of the practitioner. ReLPAG encourages its members to consider a narrow interpretation of the rules in the Governmental Regulations.
  - ReLPAG encourages its members and the community in need to consider and make use of tele-and video psycho-health services to stop the spread of this deadly virus rather than face-to-face services.
  - Lastly, ReLPAG emphasises, tele-health is done to the same professional and ethic standards than face- to- face sessions. Like with any professional procedure, it is standard procedure for clients to be informed regarding the process, before considering to give your consent, and only then to continue open communication.
7. Locally and worldwide, people of all age are in acute distress and trauma. The vulnerable in the community and those who cannot afford services are in all likelihood at a point of surrender to hopelessness. This is a time when ReLPAG and its members are acutely aware that the services of Mental Health Professionals are needed more than ever. We ask the public to let our members assist you in a responsible way under these extra ordinary circumstances. ReLPAG also plead with Government and internet providers to make provision for those who cannot, due to poverty, access telehealth services.

This is an extraordinary time where extraordinary actions should be considered with extraordinary empathy. ReLPAG cautions, we as psychologists and registered counsellors, cannot put others at risk through our actions, how well meant they might be. We cannot be responsible or accountable for the suffering of a single person and/or them experiencing it more life-threatening as it already is.

ReLPAG EXCO encourages its members to keep doing the good work. Let us share and make each other strong, while facing difficult decisions, working towards empowering ourselves and others while practicing psychology during these challenging times.

*Anne-Marie Rencken, no*

ReLPAG, Chairperson [www.relpag.co.za](http://www.relpag.co.za)