

Starting Out in Private Practice



First of all, congratulations on starting your new career!

I have included the steps to starting in private practice as though this is your first business so if it isn't, you may already have considered or implemented some of the following steps.

Either way, this guide aims to help ease you into the world of self-employment as a counsellor. If you feel overwhelmed at any time, remember that it's OK to take your time. Just familiarising yourself with some of the first steps is a great place to start.

Also, **you can learn what you don't yet know**, so don't worry if any of the considerations listed are unfamiliar to you right now.

If you find yourself procrastinating, I invite you to get curious as to why. What is the barrier getting in the way? Are you not ready for that particular point right now or is something else going on? Get to know your barriers and talk them through with someone in your support network.

This guide sets out the steps and considerations you need in order to make a living from seeing clients – this is what you trained to do, and you can now begin this exciting part of your career journey.

Please note that I am not legally trained. The following is from my own experience setting up in private practice. Where I have shared the service that I chose to use, I do not receive anything for mentioning them, neither am I suggesting they are right for you. It's just a sharing of who I used as a starting point. There may be many options out there for you to research and compare to make the right choice for you.

Legal & Formalities



Registering with HMRC: Most counsellors tend to register as a Sole Trader however it might be worth doing your own research to decide what is best for you.

You may **need to register before you can include any expenses** so consider doing this before parting with any money. If you are from the UK, you can visit HMRC here:

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/business/setting-up>

Or call them on **0300 200 3300**

Insurance: To include Public Liability and Professional Indemnity. An internet search for ‘insurance for counsellors’ will yield results and I also advise asking other counsellors who they are with or posting on a social media group and see what comes up there all as part of your initial research. I use Balens, however, it doesn’t hurt to ask around and take a look for yourself.

Professional Registration: If you belong to NCPS, BACP or another body, familiarise yourself with their code of ethics to make sure you are adhering to them. Maybe include on your website or contract whose code of ethics you follow to add weight to your credibility. Display their logo within the terms of your particular governing body’s framework.

You may be required to keep a log of your client, supervision and CPD, more on this in the next section.

ICO: Information Commissioners Office – You are likely to be required to belong to the ICO. This shows that you take data protection seriously. The annual cost at the time of publishing this guide is between £40 - £60 for most counsellors.

DBS: You only need a DBS in some situations such as when working with minors. You may or may not need one so look into this for your individual circumstances.

Accounting: Will you use software? Will you pay an accountant? Or will you do your own accounting? If so, how will you log your accounting information and keep accurate records?

Professional Will: A professional will exists to assign a trusted other to notify your clients in the event of your death. They will also wind down your business. There are apps available that serve this purpose, or you can set up a system yourself.

Paperwork & Systems



Invoices & Receipts: Will you invoice your clients or provide receipts? Will you use software or create your own? It can be worth having both templates in place in case you are asked for an invoice or receipt by a client.

Code Systems: How will you identify your clients notes or phone number without having identifiable details attached? Will you use a code system rather than their name?

Storage: How will you safely store contracts and notes? If in paper format you will need to keep notes separate from identifiable details such as name, number, address and email. Having one lockable filing cabinet for contracts and personal details and another for notes that use a code rather than a name is one way to safely store data and notes. These filing cabinets should not be portable and should have separate keys to access them kept in a safe place.

Contract: What needs to go into your contract? Do you have a separate signage space for a GDPR statement? Include your fees, cancellation / non-attendance policy in your

contract as well as session durations, dates and times. It can be wise to add that you may review rates annually and you do not accept social media requests.

Fees: Will you have a set fee or a sliding scale? Will you offer any concessionary rates? If so, how many? Will you offer a free call or video call? How long will this be? Will you offer a free first session? What will this cost you in terms of room rent? There is no black and white, right or wrong here. Consider what is right for you.

Hours: How many hours do you wish to fill each week? Are you willing to work weekends and evenings? Consider what you want your working week to look like and stick to it to prevent ending up working hours you didn't really want to because you were asked to.

Payment: How will your clients pay you and when? Before the session? If so, how far in advance of the session? After the session, if so, how long after, straight away or with a few days grace before you chase? With an invoice at the end of each month? If so, how long after sending your invoice are they to pay you by?

Cancellation Policy: How much notice will you require for a cancellation? A week, 48 hours, 24 hours? Will you charge a cancellation fee? How much will you charge? How firm is your boundary on charging if you choose to have a fee? What if your client hasn't paid and doesn't show? What if they have paid and doesn't show? This may emerge and change as you go rather than coming to you as an answer right now but it is good to start thinking about it.

Safeguarding Policies: Do you have a lone worker policy to protect yourself if you are hiring a room in a building? Do you have a plan in place if you are concerned for client safety? Discuss safeguarding policies with your supervisor.

Intake Form: Will you use an initial intake or assessment form with your clients? Will you want them to fill it out before hand or during your first session / sessions? Do you like to use evaluation forms at the end, throughout, or not at all? Use what others do to inform you but ultimately you will find what works for you.

Log: Setting up a log from the start can be very useful. It should include your client hours, CPD hours, supervision hours and personal therapy hours if you are in therapy. It is easier to set this up and update it regularly than it is to look back over a period of time to backdate it.

Crisis Numbers: Source a list of crisis numbers and keep it somewhere easy to find. You can add to this as time goes on.

Worksheet Folder: If you are likely to use any worksheets or theory with your client, have a folder to hand you can add to as you go.

Branding, Practicalities & Ongoing



Business Name: What will you call yourself? Will you use your name, or will you use a business name you made up? Will it have the word 'Counselling' in it? I started as Milton Counselling but then added further strings to my bow and changed to Milton Minds. Changing your brand isn't ideal so using your name could help keep your umbrella wide but using the word 'Counselling' could help people find you.

Website: Who will you use for your website? Ask other counsellors what they did for ideas. The rates vary so much so shop around! I used Upwork and spent time researching who felt right for me. Their rates and communication were important to me however they have percentages of satisfied customers and hours worked to help inform you too. Upwork is just one way to build your website.

Email: Do you have a secure business email separate from your general email?

Directories: What directories do you want to belong to? Write a bio that fits who you are as a counsellor rather than trying to appeal to everybody. If you have any specialities in terms of training or experience be sure to include those here. Any placement experience? Add it. You may be able to call and ask for tips and pointers with some of the directories. Revisit your bio from time to time, does it still best represent you or do you wish to tweak it?

Marketing: How will you market yourself? Will you use social media? If so, keep this separate from your personal social media. Will you use printed cards and flyers? Will you physically network? I used Vistaprint for cards and flyers and Canva to create social media posts.

Physical Workspace: If you are going to see clients face-to-face you will need an appropriate working space. Will you hire a room, or use a space in your home? If seeking a room, ask around rather than solely looking on the internet as not all room-hire

opportunities are always listed on the internet. Ask if there are any noisy neighbours hiring a room during your working hours to help ensure you have a quiet, peaceful space for seeing clients.

Online Platform: Will you see clients online? What platform will you use and is it secure? Are you familiar with the platform? Have you had any extra training to work online? What are your professional body's framework for online training before working online?

Supervision: It is likely that you already have a supervisor in place however if you do not, have a look around to find the right for you and check the ratio of client hours to supervision with the professional body you are registered with. Have a chat with them before committing, chat to a couple to find the best fit for you. I am a qualified clinical supervisor and offer discounts for newly qualified counsellors. I see supervisees from many modalities and always meet you where you are to help you grow as the counsellor you want to be. I offer Transactional Analysis theory, creative interventions, somatic exploration, meditation and mindfulness and breathwork for those wanting to expand their offerings. I also offer CPD workshops in these areas.

Colleagues: While everybody will have their own idea of what works for them, speaking to other counsellors a little further down the road can be useful. Having a network of colleagues can be useful in terms of referring clients to each other. Maybe you have a client request who isn't the best fit because they would prefer a time you do not offer, a set of expertise you do not have or are presenting with something you have chosen not to work with. Counsellors can refer to each other. They can also provide company and support in what can be a relatively isolating career. You may decide to set up a peer-to-peer supervision group.

Self-Care: Create a plan to look after yourself. Who is part of your support system? What do you need to feel OK in yourself? Keep these fresh in your mind by writing them down. Make time for them and book in regular breaks and holidays. Notice your own inner weather. Get to know your limits and needs. Familiarise yourself with the signs of burnout and compassion fatigue. If you find a certain symptom or type of client more difficult than others limit them in a way that feels right for you.

Building a client base can take time. Keep going! Reread your online profiles, create regular content online or attend networking events. Speak to other counsellors. Best of luck on your journey!



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<https://nicolahare.com/clinical-supervision-for-counsellors-online>

