

A FREE GUIDE FROM LUMEN WEB

The Private Practice Setup Guide

What to get right before you see your first client and before you publish a website, for counsellors and psychotherapists setting up in private practice in the UK.

No invented facts, no legal advice dressed up as certainty, and nothing here that assumes you already understand HMRC or the ASA.



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A note on scope: this is the free version. It covers what matters most and leaves out the detail that genuinely differs practice to practice, funding routes, niche-specific registration, and the twelve-week plan we build with paying clients. Where that's true, this guide says so rather than padding the gap.

How to use this

Read it once, start to finish, before you do anything else: the order matters, registration has to come before insurance, and the fee section changes how you'll read the website sections. After that, it works as a checklist: come back to section 01 and tick items off as they're actually in place, not just planned.

Already have a website? Sections 05 and 06 still apply, and are worth checking against what's live now, not just a new build.

Five things to have in place first

None of these are optional, and none of them are quick to arrange at the last minute. Start here, in roughly this order.



Professional body registration

BACP, UKCP, NCPS or your relevant body. Most take several weeks to process, longer if your training needs assessing.



Clinical supervision arranged

A named supervisor, meeting monthly at minimum. Your professional body's ethical framework will set the required frequency.



Professional indemnity insurance

In place before you see anyone, not after. Insurers usually ask for your registration number, so this follows step one.



ICO registration

If you hold any client data (notes, an enquiry form, a booking calendar), you very likely need to register as a data controller. Check gov.uk/data-protection, not a forum thread.



A fee you can actually explain

A number you have reasoned through, not guessed. See section 03.

This guide is information, not advice. We are not a lawyer, an accountant, or your professional body. Where a decision has legal or regulatory weight, the right next step is always the primary source, your professional body, HMRC, or the ICO, not a guide like this one.

Registration, insurance and supervision

Three requirements that get bundled together and rarely explained separately. They do three different jobs.

Professional body registration

This is what tells a prospective client (and a directory, and an insurer) that you trained properly and are accountable to an ethical framework. BACP, UKCP, NCPS and BPS/HCPC are the main UK routes. Which one fits depends on your training route, not on which sounds most prestigious. Registration is not the same as accreditation: accreditation usually comes later, after a set number of supervised hours.

Clinical supervision

A regular, structured conversation with a more experienced practitioner about your caseload: not a manager, not a mentor in the general sense. It exists to protect the client as much as you, a second, qualified perspective on your work. Most professional bodies specify a minimum ratio of supervision hours to client hours; check yours directly rather than assume it matches a colleague's.

Professional indemnity insurance

Covers you if a client claims your work caused them harm: the counselling equivalent of a tradesperson's public liability cover. Premiums are modest for a solo practitioner, and most professional bodies have a preferred insurer list, usually the fastest way to get a quote that already understands what you do.

How the three relate

Requirement	Protects	Typical timeline
Registration	The client, by verifying your training	Weeks to a few months
Supervision	The client, by reviewing your practice	Arrange before client one
Insurance	You, financially, if something goes wrong	Days, once registered

Setting your fees without guessing

There is no single right number. There is a defensible way to arrive at one.

Four things that legitimately move the number

- **Your overheads:** room rent or the cost of the space you work from, supervision, insurance, professional body fees, accountancy, a website.
- **Local comparable rates:** what other qualified practitioners charge in your area or specialism, visible on the directories in section 08.
- **Your experience and any specialist training:** a legitimate reason to charge more, not a reason to apologise for the number.
- **What you actually need to earn:** work backwards from a realistic number of weekly client hours, not an optimistic one.

A rough worked example

Item	Monthly
Room hire (2 days/week)	£220
Supervision (2 sessions)	£130
Insurance, registration, CPD (averaged)	£45
Website and admin	£30
Overheads, total	£425

At 12 client hours a week (roughly 48 a month), £425 of overheads is £8.85 per session before you have paid yourself anything. This is not a formula to copy. It exists to show the shape of the calculation, so a fee stops being a guess and becomes a number you can defend to yourself and explain to a client who asks.

Concessionary places: most practitioners keep a small number open. Decide the proportion in advance (a common approach is one in eight to ten client hours) so it is a policy, not a negotiation you have every time you're asked.

If you've never had a website before

The mechanics nobody explains, because most guides assume you already know them.

What a private practice site actually needs

- **Home:** who you are and the one thing you want a visitor to do next: get in touch.
- **About:** your training, your approach, and a photo if you have one.
- **What I help with:** named issues or specialisms, not a vague “I help everyone with everything.”
- **Fees:** the actual numbers from section 03, not a vague range. If people have to ask, most won't.
- **FAQ:** the questions people are too anxious to ask by phone.
- **Contact:** a short enquiry form, plus the legal content from section 06.

That's six pages. A first site rarely needs more than that, and a site with fifteen half-finished pages is worse than one with six good ones.

Buying a domain, in short

A domain is the web address people type or find you by (yourpractice.co.uk). Buy one from any registrar, a few pounds a year, as soon as you've settled on a name, even months before the site itself is ready. It costs little to hold and settles your practice name across directories and email at the same time. Prefer .co.uk for a UK practice, prefer your practice name over your own name unless you're deliberately building a personal brand, and prefer something short and easy to say aloud (you'll be giving it out by phone). A domain you own yourself, not a subdomain of a website builder or a directory listing, is the one part of this that stays yours if you ever change provider. Note it isn't the whole website: a domain is just the address, and still needs somewhere to actually point at, hosting, which a DIY builder or a studio build normally includes.

Three ways to actually get one built

Route	Typical cost	Best if, and watch for
A DIY builder (Wix, Squarespace, etc.)	Roughly £10–£20 a month	Best if you're comfortable writing your own copy and checking it yourself. Watch for: the rules in sections 05–06 are easy to miss with nobody checking.
A freelance designer	Often £300–£1,500+ one-off, plus hosting	Best if you want something bespoke and have time to brief them well. Watch for: most general designers haven't heard of the rules in section 05.
A specialist studio (built for this profession)	Varies; ask for a published price	Best if you'd rather sections 05–06 were built in by default, not checked afterward. Still your job to check it sounds like you, not a template.

Mistakes a first website usually makes

- No fees shown, so every enquiry starts with “how much do you charge?”
- A stock photo that looks like one, or no photo and no explanation why
- “I help with everything,” which reassures nobody
- Legal pages added after launch instead of before it (section 06)
- Wording that risks a complaint nobody meant to risk (section 05)
- Never actually checked on a phone, where most visitors are

The wording you're not allowed to use

Your website is advertising in the eyes of the ASA, and the rules are stricter than most practitioners realise.

The core rule: you should not claim to treat, cure, or offer a medical solution for conditions that require diagnosis or treatment by a medically qualified professional (certain mental health conditions among them) unless you hold that qualification yourself. This applies to word choice, not intent. A sincerely meant claim is still a claim.

Risks a complaint	Says the same thing safely
"I treat anxiety and depression."	"I work with adults living with anxiety and low mood."
"Counselling will cure your trauma."	"Many people find counselling helps them process difficult experiences."
"Guaranteed results within six sessions."	"Some people notice a shift within a few weeks; for others it takes longer."
"The most effective therapy for [condition]."	"An approach that suits people who want structure and a clear focus."

More rules worth knowing

- Client testimonials are ethically fraught for most professional bodies. Check your own body's position before publishing one, even a genuine one.
- Comparative claims about other practitioners or approaches are not allowed, however mild.
- You can describe your training and experience factually. That is not a claim, and it is usually the strongest thing on the page.
- Job titles are their own trap: "psychologist" is a UK-protected title (HCPC registration required) and "psychiatrist" implies a medical qualification. "Counsellor" and "psychotherapist" aren't legally protected titles, but your own professional body's rules on them still apply.

None of this is a substitute for checking your own wording. CAP (the Committee of Advertising Practice) runs a free Copy Advice service for exactly this, [capcode.org.uk](https://www.capcode.org.uk), worth using before anything goes live, not after a complaint.

What your website legally needs on it

Separate from the advertising rules above: the baseline legal content almost every practice website is missing.



A privacy notice

What you collect through the site, why, how long you keep it, and how someone can ask you to delete it. Required under UK GDPR the moment you collect any personal data, including through a contact form.



Your ICO registration number

If you're registered (see section 01), the number itself should be findable on the site, typically in the footer or the privacy notice.



An accessibility statement

Not strictly mandatory for a private individual's site the way it is for public bodies, but a short honest statement costs little and matters a great deal to a proportion of your visitors. WCAG 2.2 AA is the standard worth aiming for and asking a builder about.



A complaints route

Naming your professional body's formal complaints process, even if you hope never to need it.



A crisis line

A calm, permanent, non-dismissible line on every page: this is not an emergency service, and where to go instead. 999, NHS 111 option 2, Samaritans on 116 123.

On the enquiry form specifically

Ask for the minimum: a name, a way to contact them, and an optional free-text message. Do not ask for date of birth, GP details, a diagnosis, or anything clinical. A website form is the wrong place to collect special-category health data, and asking for it changes what you are legally holding. State plainly, near the form, where the message goes and who reads it.

On tracking: a visitor researching their own mental health should not become an advertising segment. Avoid Meta Pixel, Google Analytics and similar tools; a cookieless option like Plausible or Umami, or nothing at all, keeps you out of that problem entirely and removes the need for a cookie banner.

Your first twelve weeks, roughly

Everyone's sequence differs, but the dependencies mostly don't: registration has to come before insurance, and insurance before you see anyone. This is the shape, not a promise.

Weeks 1–3	Apply for professional body registration. Contact 2–3 potential supervisors.
Weeks 3–5	Registration processing. Confirm a supervisor and your first session with them.
Weeks 4–6	Arrange indemnity insurance once registration is confirmed. Register with the ICO if you hold client data.
Weeks 5–8	Work out your fee using the method in section 03. Decide your concessionary policy.
Weeks 6–10	Content and build for your website: check wording against section 05, legal content against section 06.
Weeks 9–12	Website live. List on 1–2 directories. First client sessions.

This is the free version of the timeline. Our paying clients get the full twelve-week plan with the reasoning behind each step, sourced figures throughout, and a review built in at week six to catch what isn't working before it costs you a month.

Getting found, once you're live

A beautiful site nobody finds does nothing. Most first enquiries come from a directory profile (section 08) or someone searching your practice's actual name, not from ranking for a generic term like “counsellor near me,” which realistically takes months of consistent content to build. Two things that help immediately and cost nothing: a free Google Business Profile (roughly twenty minutes to set up, shows up for local searches straight away), and telling people who already refer clients, GPs, other practitioners, past colleagues, that you're now taking them.

Primary sources, not us

Everything in this guide points back to a real source. Use these directly for anything with legal or regulatory weight.

Question	Go to
Which professional body fits my training?	bacp.co.uk · psychotherapy.org.uk (UKCP) · ncps.org.uk
Do I need to register with the ICO?	ico.org.uk/for-organisations/register
Is my website wording compliant?	capcode.org.uk , free Copy Advice service
Tax and self-assessment as a sole trader	gov.uk/set-up-sole-trader
Do other practitioners charge what I'm charging?	counselling-directory.org.uk · psychologytoday.com/gb · bacp.co.uk/search , filtered by area

If it's time for the website

Lumen Web builds websites for UK counsellors and psychotherapists in private practice. The wording is checked against what the ASA publishes, the legal content from section 06 is built in as standard, and your contact form is tested every day so a lost enquiry doesn't sit unnoticed for a season. Three plans, all published, from £19 a month with no setup fee.

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