

Introducing and Preparing Your Clients for Telehealth

Due to the coronavirus pandemic social distancing measures, most therapists are meeting with clients virtually through video chat or by phone. If this is the first time your clients are engaging in telehealth sessions, they might have questions or concerns. This worksheet can help you introduce your clients to telehealth and prepare them for virtual or phone sessions.

Telehealth is an Effective Form of Therapy

Numerous research studies, including one published by the *World Journal of Psychiatry*, suggest that telehealth sessions are at least as effective as in-person therapy. Virtual sessions enable clients to receive support in the midst of social distancing and self-quarantine restrictions. Clients can expect sessions to be as helpful as if they were meeting with you in person.

Telehealth is a Small Adjustment for Most Clients

If clients are familiar with video chats or video conferencing (Skype, FaceTime, Google Hang Outs), they will find the adjustment to telehealth relatively easy. Client who do not like communicating through a screen, or who have never tried it, might find it challenging. Once they understand how the technology works, they might need some time to get comfortable with the idea of talking to you virtually. You can explore any discomfort or awkwardness they feel about this method of communication, their concerns about what will be different during sessions, and other issues they may have.

Most Insurance Will Cover Telehealth During the Pandemic

If your client is concerned whether their insurance will cover therapy, have them double-check with their insurance provider. Telehealth is covered for all clients receiving Medicare during the pandemic, regardless of whether you and your client live in the same state.

Preparing Logistically for Your Meeting

- During the pandemic, all platforms are acceptable. HIPAA-compliant platforms include VSee, Zoom, and Doxy, which are fee-based and may require your client to upload special software.
- Your clients should test their software and system requirements before your sessions to ensure the video platform will work on their computers or devices, including microphone and camera functions.
- Ask your clients to find a place in their homes where they have privacy and little interruption. This is especially important for clients with children and/or pets.
- During sessions, request that your clients close their email and turn off distracting notifications. They should also close programs that slow the computer's processing ability and interfere with the video quality.

Preparing Clinically for Your Meeting

- For clients who typically meet with you in person, your first telehealth session is a good time to check in on their goals and progress, especially as they cope with pandemic stressors. If your client is new to therapy, the first session should also include a discussion about confidentiality and safety.

- Similar to your in-person therapy sessions, make sure your clients feel comfortable and at-ease. Work together to formulate a plan to address ongoing or new issues. It might be helpful to ask your clients to write down notes beforehand about issues they wish to address.
- Discuss your client's preference for meetings. Do they need weekly video meetings? Or are they looking for quick, one-off sessions for when they feel an urgent need to speak to therapist?
- If you are new to telehealth yourself, it can be comforting for your client to learn that this will be an adjustment for both of you.

The Use of Therapeutic Homework Assignments Between Telehealth Sessions

- Therapeutic homework assignments are tasks that clients work on between sessions. Homework is considered to be an important component in most evidence-based therapies, and it is a cost-effective way of increasing the impact of treatment. You can simply email PDF documents to your clients.
- By using the time between sessions, clients' completion of homework assignments increases time spent engaging in exercises designed to generalize and transfer in-session treatment gains. Engaging in skill-building daily tasks allows clients to acquire insight – and they are more likely to view themselves as proactive instead of “passive” recipients of therapy. Adherence to homework assignments might actually increase your clients' sense of mastery, self-efficacy, and optimism about treatment.
- Research suggests homework is more often completed when assignments are specific and rehearsed in-session. Consider client strengths, motivation level, and individual treatment goals.