# REOPENING YOUR PRACTICE SAFELY DURING COVID-19

Telehealth has been a necessary, and usually convenient, method of maintaining your therapy practice during the pandemic. However, you may have experienced limitations in your virtual therapy sessions, especially when serving clients with inadequate access to WiFi. Opening your therapy practice for in-person sessions can be more effective, but it also brings a number of health and safety risks.

The American Psychological Association (APA) recommends that practitioners use telehealth as much as possible and gradually transition your caseload to in-person sessions as necessary. Here are some tips for reopening your office safely.

**Get Your Office Ready**
- Clean and sanitize your office. The CDC's guide on "How to Clean and Disinfect" offers recommendations on how to deep clean during COVID-19.
- Sit at least 6 feet away from the client. Some therapists have considered installing plexiglass partitions, but OSHA has not yet recommended this for mental health practitioners.
- Use cleanable furniture and no-touch products, including chairs that can be wiped down and a no-touch trash can.
- Review your office building's protocols. You may need to let each client into the building, if it is locked. Find out what cleaning processes are in place for public bathrooms and waiting areas. Determine how positive reports of COVID-19 are disseminated.
- Prepare cleaning, disinfecting, and protective supplies, including hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, hand soap, disposable paper towels, and face masks.
- Post client reminders on your office door regarding hand washing, wearing masks, reporting symptoms, and other safety policies.

**Communicate with Clients**
- Send an email to client to set expectations about reopening, including precautions you have developed for safety and hygiene. Topics may include:
  - Reopening date and new operating hours
  - Revised policies and protocols
  - Updated cancellation policies
  - Measures you have taken to ensure safety in the office
  - COVID-19 diagnosis plan
  - Option to continue with telehealth
- Screen clients for COVID-19 symptoms 24 hours prior to their appointment and again before they enter the office. You can use the American Medical Association's pre-visit screening script as a template.

**Protect Yourself and Your Clients**
- If possible, close off your waiting area and have clients wait in their car until the time of their appointment. Or ask them to arrive at the office only five minutes prior to the appointment, to avoid clients' encounters with each other.
- Similarly, build in more time between client appointments.
- Limit non-clients from entering the office.
- Require that clients wear face masks to their appointments. In case they forget, have extra disposable masks available.
- Consider removing magazines and toys from the waiting area.
- Ask clients to use tissues when touching the door knobs in your office.
- Maintain as many of your systems online as possible. This includes online credit card payments, electronic intake forms, and sending clients PDF handouts after the session.
- Clean after each session, including doorknobs, phones, desk, tables, chairs, computer keyboard and mouse, pens, and tissue boxes.
- Keep your office ventilated by opening your window after each session. You can also spray a disinfectant in the room.

**Prepare Policies and Guidelines**
- Prepare informed consent forms and update policies and procedures to address the coronavirus and for transitioning to in-person sessions. The informed consent form should include the new office procedures that have been shared with clients. These might include:
  - Changes to office hours
  - Cancellation policies
  - Expectations that client verify they do not have any COVID-19 symptoms before attending the session
  - Mask usage requirement
  - Waiting room policies
- Contact your malpractice and liability insurance to determine if additional coverage is needed during reopening.
- Create a plan in case one of your clients is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19. Consider applying the CDC's employee guidelines regarding possible exposure to other clients and yourself.
- Stay up-to-date with health insurance policies regarding continued telehealth reimbursement.