



with



Tele-health Protocols – a brief summary

As an overall rule, try to make the virtual visit as much like a real life visit as you can. Welcome your clients into your virtual office with the same warmth and professionalism that you would welcome them into your real life office.

Assuring privacy

Always ask your client if they are comfortable with doing a session at this time. Do they have privacy? Do they feel like they can talk openly? Don't assume they're safe. Don't assume they have confidentiality and privacy. Be respectful and supportive if client says it's not a good time or they need to stop.

Assure client that the same privacy rules are used as in a face-to-face encounter. You may want to do this at the start of each session at least at the beginning.

No recording, visitors, observers without the client's consent.

Use the waiting room if your telehealth platform has that feature so you can bring your client into the session when you are ready. This will increase the level of privacy for both you and your client.

HIPAA compliance is a must! Using an encrypted platform is generally required, though due to the COVID-19 crisis there is some flexibility regarding HIPAA rules in tele-health. An FAQ from HHS on the subject is available here: <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/telehealth-faqs-508.pdf>

Patient Safety

Always have phone numbers where you can reach your client. Know how you would reach 911 services for their location.

911 - Plan ahead: If you are providing telehealth services to a client in another city or state, call the police department in the town where he or she is located and get the 10-digit number (7 digits + area code) to call in case of emergencies and keep it handy in your sessions. If an emergency arises, call the 10-digit number instead of 911. It will connect you directly to the correct Public Service Answering Point, and you can give the call-taker the address so they can send help. Contact information for local law enforcement agencies should be available online.

Don't end the connection: If you have the client online or on the phone with you and there's another phone available, don't stop the connection with the client. Call from the other phone so you can ask the client questions if needed.





Orienting to the technology

A trial run is important. You may want to spend your first session getting yourself and your client used to the technology and the equipment, and building the relationship online.

You may have to provide more reassurance to the client than in a face-to-face encounter.

Technical glitches

Telephone back up is important in case of emergencies; technology is not perfect.

Rapid tech support *and* communication as to what is going on is important. If possible immediately contact the client by an alternate method to tell them what is happening. Better to over communicate than under. Be upfront about what is going on.

Demeanor

Eye contact during the session is important. It's important to not only be engaged but to be seen that you are. Avoid looking down which can be seen as a lack of interest. Looking into the camera lens can be seen as more engaging.

Your Virtual Office

Be sure you have sufficient bandwidth to support a virtual session. Minimum of 348k. Faster is better.

Ensure you have a quiet location with no distractions. Silence reminders and phones. Close any unnecessary programs on your device.

Background should be neutral but not sterile . Light blue is notably a soothing background color.

Avoid showing family or very personal photos.

Consider using a virtual background, an option available on Zoom and other platforms. In many platforms you can upload your own photo.

Choice of clothing is important – plaids may cause pixilation.

Cross-state services: If you provide tele-health services across state lines, you need to be licensed in both the state you are in and the state the client is in. Currently, in June 2020, waivers are in place for that due to the COVID-19 crisis. Check with your licensing boards to be sure in your own situation.

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