



# Informed Consent for Telehealth Services

*The Digital Age continues to facilitate new ways to assist people to meet their mental health needs. We are happy to move in step with technological advancements to provide telehealth services. As part of our commitment to your well-being and safety, a few guidelines should be discussed. Please read this carefully.*

## **Telehealth**

I understand that my health care provider wishes me to engage in telehealth services. Variously dubbed telemedicine, teletherapy, distance therapy, e-therapy, internet therapy, or online therapy, “telehealth” is defined as the use of electronic transmission to provide interactive real-time mental health services remotely, including consultation, assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, counseling, psychotherapy, coaching, guidance, education, and transfer of medical information with an experienced psychotherapist. This can include both video and audio forms of communication, via the internet or telephone. Telehealth services do not include texting or e-mail.

My health care provider explained to me how the video conferencing technology that will be used is not the same as a direct client/therapist visit due to the fact that I will not be in the same room as my provider.

## **Office Agreements**

Telehealth is governed by all the same ethics and laws that cover in-office, in-person, face-to-face psychological service. So, all other policies and consents in the psychotherapist's office agreement forms apply to telehealth services. This document is an addendum to, and does not substitute for, our standard in-office services agreements.

## **Advantages & Disadvantages**

The advantage of telehealth is that it can flexibly provide continuity of care when an in-person treatment session cannot be conducted in the office. Similar to a regular in-person therapy session, telehealth allows for both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Telehealth is not a universal substitute, nor the same as, in-person psychological service. I understand there are potential risks to this technology, including interruptions, unauthorized access, and technical difficulties. I understand that my health care provider or I can discontinue the telehealth consult/visit if it is felt that the videoconferencing connections are not adequate for the situation. Like in-person psychotherapy, telehealth services are never guaranteed.

## **Prerequisites**

Telehealth is not suited to all circumstances. Telehealth is only part of your psychotherapy. Telehealth services in this office are only provided to previously established patients with a plan to have at least intermittent in-person sessions in the office when circumstances allow.

Telehealth requires reasonable comfort with technology.

Telehealth is best for augmenting in person services when the patient is unable to come in to the physical office location due to temporary limitations, such as

public health advisories, medical conditions limiting physical mobility, distance due to travel, and scheduling conflicts. Ideally, it is recommended we meet in-person in the office when conditions allow in order to provide optimal care. If in-person sessions are recommended and cannot be scheduled, the psychotherapist will discuss referral to another appropriate provider who can provide such services.

Professional services are being provided under a license or permit issued by and limited to practice within the state of California. Therefore, the patient affirms they reside in the state of California at the time of telehealth services.

## **Emergencies**

At the start of each session, we need a safety plan that includes at least one emergency contact and the closest ER to your location, in the event of a crisis situation.

Telehealth is not recommended for a psychological emergency. Telehealth services are only provided when it is unlikely that a mental health emergency could arise during the session. Overwhelming or potentially dangerous challenges are best addressed with in-person professional support. In the event that in-person sessions are recommended due to symptom severity, the patient is asked to accept recommendations for an for an in-person session.

Just like in-person services, if an emergency should occur during a telehealth session, the psychotherapist may consider taking any steps necessary to ensure the safety of the patient or of others.

The secure telehealth platform we use is NOT an emergency service. You agree that in the event of an emergency, you will use a telephone to call 911.

## **Scheduling**

Just like an in-person appointment, telehealth sessions are scheduled in advance by prior arrangement. Your appointment time is reserved specifically for you. Just like in-person appointments, you are responsible for keeping all telehealth appointments.

We will both do our best to start and end on time. In all telehealth sessions, the therapist will initiate the telehealth session, unless other arrangements have been made. A window will remain open around the starting time of your appointment. Just like an in-person session, if your psychotherapist doesn't hear from you, they will attempt to reach you but will discontinue after several attempts.

Cancellations and unkept appointments are treated just like in-person cancellations and unkept appointments, and will be charged accordingly.

**Confidentiality**

The laws that protect the confidentiality of your medical information in the office also apply to telehealth sessions, including mandatory and permissive exceptions to confidentiality.

The patient and psychotherapist both agree to keep the same privacy safeguards as during an in-person session. The environment should be free from unexpected or unauthorized intrusions or disruptions to our communication. There is a risk of being overheard by a third party near you if you do not conduct the session in an enclosed private room, with reasonable sound barriers, and with no one else present or observing. To maintain confidentiality, you agree not to share your telehealth appointment link with anyone unauthorized to attend the appointment.

The patient and psychotherapist both agree to not record the telehealth sessions without prior written consent of both parties.

**Consent**

You have the right to opt in or opt out of the methods of telehealth communication at any time, without affecting your right to future care or treatment.

If you are not an adult, we need the permission of your parent/legal guardian (and their contact information) for you to participate in telehealth sessions.

**Security**

No electronic transmission system is considered completely safe from intrusion. Interception of communication by third parties remains technically possible.

Due to the complexities of electronic media and the internet, risks of telehealth include the potential for release of private information, including audio and images. So, your psychotherapist cannot fully guarantee the security of telehealth sessions. You are responsible for the security of information on your computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone.

The software program we use for telehealth is encrypted, and is compliant with Federal law to protect the privacy of your health communication, unless we inform you otherwise.

***I have read and understand the information provided above. I have discussed it with my psychotherapist. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby request and consent to telehealth services as a part of my treatment. I agree to abide by the terms of this agreement.***

**Telephone**

Telehealth can include telephone sessions. When using the telephone, remember to be in a place you feel comfortable speaking about personal and private matters. If you are using a cellular telephone, remember that not all calls or telephones are absolutely secure and may be compromised by various detection devices. A landline, if available, is preferable because it is more secure, more reliable, and often offers clearer audio quality.

**Video Conferencing**

The patient is responsible for their own hardware and software, audio and video peripherals, and connectivity and bandwidth considerations.

At the time of the telehealth appointment, it is your responsibility to have your electronic device on, video conferencing software launched, and be ready to start the session at the time of the scheduled telehealth appointment.

Before an initial telehealth session, a test call up to 10 minutes can be arranged to ensure that technology is functioning properly.

My provider will develop a back-up plan with me (e.g., phone number where I can be reached) to restart the session or to reschedule it, in the event of technical problems.

If a video telehealth session is blocked after several reasonable attempts, we will switch to a telephone session for that time.

**Payment**

Just like in-person services, telehealth services are a professional service, and a fee is charged at the same rate as in-person services.

Even when health insurance covers in-person services, health insurance may limit or deny coverage of telehealth services. You are responsible to confirm and know in advance what your insurance may or may not cover. Even if your insurance does not cover telehealth services, you are personally responsible for full payment.

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Patient Signature	Patient Signature	Date
Therapist Signature		Date

# Technical Instructions for Telehealth Video Conferencing

*Below are specific technical instructions for preparing for your initial telehealth session. Please read this carefully. If you have any questions, please contact your therapist in advance of your first telehealth appointment.*

## **Hardware**

You are responsible to provide your own computer or smart phone, with an integrated webcam, microphone and speaker, and internet connection.

## **Software**

In our office, we use Zoom videoconferencing software. Zoom downloaded from [www.Zoom.us](http://www.Zoom.us) is free and allows secure communication via picture share, screen share, and real-time audio/video. So, it is fully compliant with federal telecommunication security protocols.

Zoom runs on any operating system, and any hardware including desktop computer, laptop, tablet, or cellular telephone.

## **Set-Up**

Telehealth videoconferencing can take increased set-up time and requires reasonable comfort with technology. Please test all of your systems and technical capabilities ahead of time. It is important to use a secure internet connection rather than public/free WiFi.

Before your first session with the therapist, we recommend that you ensure that your software and hardware are working together properly and that you know how to operate them.

Confirm your internet connection is fast enough to provide a full signal and won't be saturated. To help with this, we recommend you shut down all unnecessary other programs and apps before getting on a Zoom call. If you are able to use a hard-wired ethernet connection to your internet modem, this gives a more reliable internet signal for Zoom to use. Or, you may need to determine the location in your home with best WiFi connection.

You can get basic instructions on how to use Zoom if you want more details here: <https://blog.zoom.us/wordpress/2020/03/18/quick-info-how-to-zoom-new-videos/>

## **Test Call**

Before an initial telehealth session, a test call up to 10 minutes can be arranged with your therapist to ensure that technology is functioning and you are comfortable getting onto a scheduled Zoom session.

## **Environment**

Make sure your video conference session is in a private place, free from distraction or intrusion. A room with a door that closes is best.

Confirm there is plenty of even light with minimal glare. Try not to have a bright window behind you, as that puts you in shadow.

Aim your camera. Check your camera angle. Check to see that your face can be seen. Avoid positioning your camera too low or too high. Try to fill the screen as much as possible.

To maximize audio quality, freedom from extraneous noise, and privacy, a headset or earbuds may help.

The most important part of a video conference is not the video—it is the audio. Speak in your normal voice, without shouting.

Try not to talk at the same time as your provider. "Double talk" may cause audio feedback and echo. Allow the other person to finish speaking before you speak. Since audio has a very slight delay, you may want to pause briefly for the therapist to respond or to make comments.

Please dress as you would for an in-person appointment.

## **Session**

Just like an in-person appointment, schedule your telehealth session in advance.

10-15 minutes before the appointment time, have your device on, video conferencing software launched, and be ready to start the session at the time of the scheduled telehealth appointment.

We recommend you shut down all unnecessary other programs before the session.

Your therapist will initiate the call at the appointment time.

## **Distortion or Disruption**

If the connection is distorted or interrupted by a technical malfunction, we may disconnect and try again. If a video telehealth session is blocked after several reasonable attempts, we will switch to a telephone session for that time. Your provider will use the back-up plan (e.g., phone number where you can be reached) to reach you in the event of technical problems.