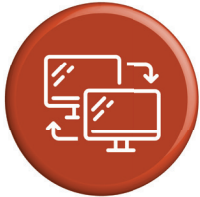


Tips for Clinicians/Counselors Providing Services Using Videoconferencing



Background

The use of technology through a web-based videoconferencing platform in a real-time manner (synchronous) is often called telehealth or telebehavioral health. Delivering assessment and treatment services using this type of technology has been shown as a way to increase patients' access to behavioral health services. Recent research confirms high levels of satisfaction among patients/clients, along with positive treatment outcomes. Most importantly, services delivered through videoconferencing require specific skills and knowledge rather than simply turning on a webcam and chatting online. This document provides clinicians/counselors useful tips based on guidelines (<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/pdf/10.1089/tmj.2018.0237>) for delivering services virtually.

Establishing Screenside Manner



Do...

- Look directly into the camera rather than looking at the picture of the person on the screen (pseudo-eye contact)
- Balance facilitative and directive language (e.g., What are your thoughts about next steps you might take; It sounds like you have a lot of background noise going on. Can you move to a different spot for our session?)
- Wear solid colors and dress as if you are going to work in the clinic/office
- Nod your head and lean forward
- Stay seated (don't pace) and sit-up straight
- Adjust camera so your entire face is visible and facing forward



Avoid...

- Fidgeting, tapping, doodling, etc. (any kind of distracting behavior)
- Eating or drinking during sessions (if you need to take a sip of water, turn your head away from the camera)
- Video-camera shaming (demanding that a patient/client turn on their camera)
- Making exaggerated motions with hands



Setting Up Office Space...

- Remove all distractions (you don't want patients/clients focused on trying to figure out what is on your bookshelf)
- Ensure there is good lighting (no shadowed face or halo effect)
- Provide a private and clean looking space
- Aim for a neutral backdrop like a plain wall or bookshelf
- Don't sit with a window behind you that can cast shadows
- Ensure good placement of camera, microphone, and speakers
- Remove any Alexa-type devices
- Put a Do Not Disturb sign on the door



Serving as a Role Model...

- Turn off phone and email (avoid distractions)
- Use a virtual waiting room but be on time
- Demonstrate professionalism
- Being online can cause people to act more casually (called disinhibition effect)
- Avoid self-disclosures or chatting (follow the 90/10 rule: listen, reflect, support, identify

discrepancies, roll with resistance 90% of the time; self-disclose/chat 10% of the time at the beginning/end of the session)

- Maintain boundaries (remember this is a counseling session, not a casual virtual meeting with friends)



Competency and Ethical Practice...

Most clinician/counselor Code of Ethics require them to only practice within their scope of expertise. Typically, initial competency required for licensure or certification is demonstrated through education, training, and clinical supervision. Recently, many professional associations (NASW, APA, AAMFT, etc.) have added sections to their ethical codes regarding the use of technology for clinical service delivery and the term “demonstrating competency” is used. Minimally, clinicians/counselors using a videoconferencing platform for service delivery should be able to show their capacity to use the technology with basic skills and be able to troubleshoot problems. Specifically, clinicians/counselors should be able to do the following when delivering services virtually:

- Advise and help patients/clients with their use of the selected technology platform
- Explain the reasons for their choice of technology platform (e.g., ease of use, affordability, functionality, privacy and security, federal confidentiality 42CFR Part 2 protections, etc.)
- Translate clinical skills to provide services virtually (e.g., online engagement, support, pointing out discrepancies, employing EBPs and best practices, making referrals, etc.)
- Determine which patients/clients should not receive services using videoconferencing



Ask yourself these five questions to determine your readiness:

- Just because I can use videoconferencing to conduct sessions, should I?
- What is my level of competence? (Beginner or Master’s level)
- Do I need more training and/or supervision?
- Does my practice/organization adhere to any specific videoconferencing guidelines?
- Am I proficient in the four skills listed above?



Determine if...

- State Licensing Boards waived restrictions on videoconferencing due to state declared disaster
- Your Professional

Liability Policy includes service delivery via videoconferencing platform. If so, get a copy of the policy and if not purchase a special rider policy.



References

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APA and ATA Guidelines for Videoconferencing (2018) <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/pdf/10.1089/tmj.2018.0237>