



## **Telemental Health Informed Consent**

### **What is Telemental Health?**

Telemental healthcare is the use of technology, like video conferencing software, to provide mental health services at a distance. Your treatment will be provided through interactive audio, video, and/or telephone communication.

### **Benefits & Risks**

There are several benefits to using telemental health services. It increases accessibility to treatment, reduces travel time, and allows for participation in therapy from an environment of your choosing. Years of empirical research has established telemental healthcare as a useful and effective mode of healthcare delivery. When using technology, however, there is the risk of security and technical difficulty (e.g., disconnection of internet, computer or software not working, etc.). Please refer to the "Telemental Health Checklist" to reduce technical issues, maximize security, and make the most of your therapeutic experience. Additionally, technical issues can sometimes limit visual or auditory cues and contribute to miscommunication or misunderstanding. These moments can be frustrating and interrupt the normal flow of personal interaction. Please know that open, clear, and meaningful communication is one of my highest priorities. I invite you to talk to me about any challenges or perceived misunderstandings you may experience during our sessions. If interruptions persist and impact your treatment, we will discuss alternatives and consider referrals to in-person counseling.

### **Necessity of In-Person Evaluation**

Telemental health is not appropriate for all clients. We will regularly evaluate the appropriateness of this modality for your needs. If it becomes clear that telemental health



is not suitable for your mental health needs, I will assist you in finding alternative options (e.g., face-to-face therapy).

### **Privacy & Confidentiality**

The laws that protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your health information also apply to telemental health services. For more information about exceptions to Notice of Privacy Practices and confidentiality, please refer to the Disclosure Statement, Informed Consent, Privacy Policies.

### **Video Recording**

No permanent video or voice recordings are kept from our telemental health sessions. To preserve your privacy and confidentiality, it is also advised that you do not record or store videoconference or phone sessions.

### **Location**

For safety reasons, you will be asked to disclose your physical address at the start of each session. If you anticipate that you will be traveling or changing locations, please let me know in advance, if possible, so that we can make the appropriate arrangements. When scheduling or needing to contact me, please be aware that I am in Central Texas and abide by the Central Standard Time Zone. Please refer to Disclosure Statement, Informed Consent, Privacy Policies Document for more information about my availability and emergency resources. You will be informed if my hours or location change.

### **Emergency Contact Person**

You are required to provide contact information to an emergency person of your choice. This person would be contacted only in cases of an emergency. This person must be over the age of 18 and willing and able to physically go to your location in the event of an



emergency. Alternatively, and depending on the nature of the emergency, I might contact local authorities or mental health deputies.

### **Bringing Someone to Sessions**

If you would like to have a family member or another person join you in your session, please first discuss this with me to make arrangements. If you do not make prior arrangements, sessions that include unapproved individuals will be terminated.

### **Technical Difficulties**

If reception is bad, or if our session gets disconnected, we will try to reconnect by restarting the video platform. If we still experience technical difficulties, we will use phone to continue with our session. You also have the option to cancel or reschedule your session.

## **Telemental Health Checklist**

**These instructions are intended to help you reduce technical issues, maximize security, and make the most out of your therapeutic experience. It is advised that you follow these instructions for all our sessions.**

### **Your Environment**

Part of what makes counseling effective, is having a space to deeply work on the things that have been troubling you. To do this kind of work, the space needs to feel safe, sacred, and peaceful. During in-office visits, this type of environment is created by your therapist, however, for online counseling you are responsible for creating that space. Fortunately, most people's homes (the place many clients choose for online counseling) is already a place where they feel comfortable and at ease. Nevertheless, go through the following checklist to make sure your space is optimal for your therapeutic experience.

- Location is physically safe (e.g., not driving while having a session).
- Location is emotionally safe (e.g., not having a session at work where you might be reprimanded for displaying emotion).
- Chair or couch you are using is comfortable and suitable for long-term use.
- Tissues are nearby, if needed.
- Coffee/tea/water is prepared and nearby, if needed.
- Space is free of clutter and other distractions (e.g., TV is not on in the background).
- Other strategies to make your space more comfortable (e.g., lighting a candle, using essential oils, having a sweater/blanket nearby, etc.).

### **Improving Privacy & Confidentiality**

- Location is in a private setting (e.g., home office vs. local coffee shop).

- Use a noise maker if others are in the next room and you need to drown out sound.
- Use headphones to prevent others from hearing my voice.
- Use your personal phone or computer (ideally, one that is not shared by others).
- Password protect any technology you will be using to communicate with me.
- Always log out or hang up once the session is complete.
- Whenever possible, avoid using a public wireless internet network.
- If your location has a window, be sure to close the blinds or sit across/away from the window.

### **Improving Connection on Your Computer/Laptop**

- Whenever possible, connect to the internet using an ethernet cable vs. Wi-Fi .
- If using Wi-Fi, choose a location that is as close to the router as possible.
- Disable the Wi-Fi connection from other devices during our session (e.g., tablets, phones, other computers, etc.).
- Close or disable any unnecessary programs running in the background of your computer.
- Close or disable file synchronizing or sharing services (e.g., Dropbox, Google Drive).
- Close any Cloud backup software (e.g., Mozy, iDrive, OneDrive).
- Close any web browser tabs or windows open on your computer.
- Plug your laptop computer into the wall charger or have the charger nearby.

### **Improving Connection on Your Phone/Tablet**

- Choose an area that gives you the fullest bars for connection.
- If using Wi-Fi, choose a location that is as close to the router as possible.
- Disable the Wi-Fi connection from other devices during our session (e.g., tablets, phones, other computers, etc.).

- Choose a location that is away from other electronic devices that might interfere with reception (e.g., tablets, other phones, laptops, microwaves, etc.).
- Close or disable any apps or programs open on your phone.
- Close or disable any apps that require Bluetooth.
- Close or disable any apps that are using GPS locators.
- Make sure that your phone is sufficiently charged and/or have a charger nearby.

### **Decreasing Interruptions**

- Unless you're using your phone for our session, please keep your phone put away and on silent.
- Turn off or disable email, calendar, or social media notifications on your phone and computer.
- If necessary, inform family/friends/colleagues, that you will be unavailable during our session time.

### **Improving Visual and Auditory Cues**

My assessment of your mental health status, well-being, and progress is largely based on the information that you provide (both visually and verbally). Therefore, it is imperative that I see you and hear you as best as possible.

- Make sure your location is well-lit.
- Avoid lighting that casts shadows (e.g., light right behind you or directly next to you).
- Have a light source that is diffused (e.g., sunlight through a window).
- Make sure that the microphone on your headphones or computer is not covered up by clothing, paper, etc.

- Whenever possible, use a desk or table to prop up your computer/phone—this will help position the camera in a way that will include both your face and upper body.
- Position the camera so that it is straight-on and centered.
- Position the camera at an angle that will facilitate eye-to-eye contact.
- Avoid walking, standing, and laying down, during our sessions.

### **Changing Locations**

One of the benefits of telemental health, is that you can take treatment with you while traveling. It is vital that we both reevaluate the comfort, safety, privacy, and suitability of new locations, each time there is a change. If it is determined that the conditions are not ideal for our session, we will consider alternatives (e.g., phone session vs. video), reschedule our session to another time when location is optimal, or discuss referrals to other treatment options (e.g., face-to-face counseling with a local provider). Please inform me when you anticipate a change in location so that we can plan and brainstorm ways to optimize your space.