



Operational Guidelines

Category: Clinical Services

Virtual Counselling Sessions (Telephone/PCVC)

Introduction:

The term virtual counselling is used to encompass counselling that takes place when the counsellor and client are not physically present with each other.

As you are aware, all sessions will be conducted according to Ontario Standards of Professional Practice for the Colleges of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CPRO) and Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW). These include, but are not limited to, knowledge and understanding of clinical practice methods.

In provision of telephone or video (PCVC) counselling services, Counsellors will continue to follow ethical practices. These may be found in organizational values statements (Strategic Plan), the Regulated Health Professionals Body i.e. Colleges for Social Work and Psychotherapy practices and AFS personnel policies, to name a few.

1. **Before you contact the client:**

Continue to be cognizant regarding legal issues such as consent in working with children. Children who are able to consent can give verbal consent for virtual counselling. You can reassure the client that the previously signed consent to service agreement extends to telephone/video counselling. For a new client verbal consent documented is sufficient to establish explicit consent.

Evaluate the client's verbal skills and competency on a case by case basis to make a determination if they are to benefit from this service. This would apply to persons served through Adult Services as well.

Assess levels of support required and level of risk, client functioning ability and whether or not there is poor reality testing prior to engaging in virtual counselling.

Be prepared to assess safety, risk and to engage in safety planning.

Understand the ways in which the technological environment can encourage disinhibition of both client and counsellor and have a significant impact on the therapeutic process.

2. When the session begins

If a person chooses to not engage via telephone/video sessions validate that their wishes are respected. Inform them that we are here to support them and that they can contact AFS at any time. For this person, services will resume at a later date when in person sessions are available.

Insure that the client can create a safe and secure context in which the counselling can take place.

Confirm with the client that the conversation is not being recorded by the client or the counsellor.

Discuss importance of maintaining confidentiality including those instances where there is a duty to report.

Insure that confidentiality is discussed i.e., if they can be in a space with no interruptions or if they chose to use speaker and include other participants to inform their counsellor.

Discuss ground rules such as how to schedule an appointment (at the end of the session), length of session, what to do if there is a mobile phone signal failure (who will call back), how to contact in the event an appointment needs to be cancelled or rescheduled, etc.

Depending on your theoretical perspective or which evidence-based practice you utilize follow the recommended format for each session. For example, if conducting a Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) session you would adhere to the following:

Orient person to the structure

Check-In (significant events/mood-being mindful of current pandemic)

Set the agenda together

Give periodic summaries

Assign Homework

Summarize the session and ask for feedback

Be able to apprise clients of complaint procedures available to them

3. Ending the session

Counsellors will be familiar with available supports if a crisis emerges, such as details of friends, family, address, postal code and telephone number. In the event there is high risk of harm to self or others and there is a disruption in the telephone connection, counsellors can contact the city police for assistance.

The counsellor will have knowledge and understanding of further resources of support that can be accessed by the client after the therapy session, if appropriate.

Remind clients of the availability of the Sault Area Hospitals (SAH) 24/7 Crisis Services. They can be reached at 705-759-3398 or 1-800-721-0077.

For New Clients

Follow the above and include the following:

- ✓ Read consent to the person on the telephone
- ✓ Request the client give a verbal consent
- ✓ Document their response, i.e., document in the progress note that verbal consent was provided by ___(name of client)_____ on this date.
- ✓ Obtain their signature at the next available opportunity.

Single Therapy Sessions

- ✓ Follow suggestions from above. Obtain verbal consent to service.
- ✓ Single therapy session will continue to be provided through telephone/video conferencing.
- ✓ The initial contact will be the intake administrative assistant, who will schedule the appointment and invite the counsellor. Clients will be informed that the service at this time is available by phone and will be given some guidelines. Counsellors will have provided standing appointments for this service.
- ✓ The administrative assistant that supports this service will contact the client/families the day before the scheduled single therapy session to confirm that the session is conducted on the telephone or through PCVC.
- ✓ The assigned counsellor will contact the client at the appointment date and time.
- ✓ Current STS paperwork will be completed and uploaded.
- ✓ Persons who choose not to utilize this method of contact will be maintained on a list in chronological order for contacting once we are fully operational and scheduling in person sessions.

Note: These guidelines will be evolving and we welcome your feedback.