



Guidance and considerations for providing therapy over the phone or through videoconferencing software [DRAFT]

Content derived from training provided by Lawrence Murphy, Therapy Online:

When providing therapy over the phone or videoconferencing software it is important to consider details which might not be necessary with traditional face to face service.

1. Location – Where is the client?

Whether the client is in a public place or an area they have privacy could impact what they are willing to share. Similarly, due to confidentiality reasons, it is important to assess whether the conversation can be overheard by anyone around the client. Additionally, being aware of the client's location is important for responding to potential crisis situations. Having an accurate address is useful for connecting clients with resources or notifying proper authorities of any safety concerns.

2. Access to the device – Permitted/non-Permitted

Another important consideration is who has access to the client's phone. This includes access which is permitted by the client, such as a friend the client has chosen to share their phone password with. This also includes access which may not be permitted by the client. For example, this could be a situation where someone could acquire the client's password without their knowledge. Perhaps this could occur by the client sharing their password with a friend who then shares the password with others. In the case of adolescents, there may be parents or guardians that have access to the client's phone. Similarly, in romantic relationships there could be significant others with access to the client's phone. Depending on the situation, the person accessing the client's device might see the client's call history which could identify them as a client.

3. Not "one size fits all"

In some cases, it may not be possible to provide the best service to clients at a distance or with the use of technology. One reason for this is the priority of addressing safety concerns. With clients experiencing active suicidal ideation or significant distortions in reality, the best possible service would likely be provided in person. This might also be true for clients disclosing past abuse for the first time or clients currently in relationships with ongoing violence.

4. Online disinhibition

It has been found that people often say or do things online that they normally would not do face to face. It is possible a client may express themselves more openly due to this phenomenon which could become problematic. For example, a client may share more information than they are comfortable with before trust is able to be established. This could lead to feelings of vulnerability or embarrassment which might impact the client's feelings about returning to therapy. Additionally, a client may leave the session. While

leaving an in-person session may seem like a daunting task, simply closing their computer or ending a phone call could appear much easier. If the therapist notices the session could be moving too fast, it can be helpful to address this with the client. Perhaps the therapist could explain they would first like to get to know a little about the client and who they are.

5. Ethical considerations

With the use of technology and E-Walk In, a session can be similar to entering a client's home. Along with this view into their personal life, there are many scenarios a clinician may encounter. As with entering a client's home physically, it is important to be aware of the surroundings. Being conscious of what you see or hear in the client's background and following policies and procedures around how to address these concerns is important.

6. Absence of non-verbals

The absence of non-verbal communication is one aspect that therapists often believe would impact the therapeutic experience significantly. In order to address this, therapists might find it helpful to consider what you do when meeting a client in person for the first time and the reason behind it. For example, a therapist might shake their client's hand upon meeting them for their first session. The goal behind this might be to make the client feel more welcomed. Without the opportunity to shake the client's hand, a therapist may welcome the client to the session with a statement instead. Another way to promote connection can be the use of the client's name more frequently.

There is also an advantage to the absence of non-verbal communication. It is likely that as humans we are unable to control 100% of our non-verbal expressions during a session. This implies that during in person services it is likely the client may pick up unconscious non-verbal cues that the therapist is not even aware of.

7. Where to look

When using a videoconferencing software there is the practical issue of where to focus your attention. In some cases, looking at the client's face on the screen may translate to looking somewhere else on the client's end. When engaging in a session through videoconferencing software it is recommended that the therapist center themselves in the camera and ensure they are a comfortable distance from the camera (not too zoomed in or out).