

Telemental Health Counseling Informed Consent

Telemental health refers to the provision of counseling services using technology while the counselor is in one place and the client is in a different location. There are several unique benefits and risks associated with telemental health counseling. The following information applies to telemental health counseling specifically, and the information included in my standard Professional Disclosure Statement also applies to telemental health counseling.

Credentials and Contact Information

Degrees (provide links to the websites)

Licensure (provide links to the websites)

Certification (provide links to the websites)

Physical location of practice

Email Address

Phone Number

Practice website

Benefits of Telemental Health Counseling

- **Accessibility**—Telemental health counseling is especially well-suited for clients who have transportation issues or other factors that prevent them from leaving their homes. Telemental health counseling also provides clients with a wide range of provider options not limited to their specific geographic areas.
- **Flexibility**—Scheduling telemental health counseling sessions tends to be more flexible than face-to-face scheduling because there is no commute time, and counselors and clients can meet outside of regular business hours as needed and mutually agreed upon.
- **Privacy and Comfort**—Clients do not have to physically come to a counseling office in order to receive services.
- **Effectiveness**—Telemental health is continually being researched, and initial studies support that telemental health counseling is as effective as in-person counseling services for clients concerns that are a good fit for this modality.

Risks of Telemental Health Counseling

- **Risks to Confidentiality**—Please ensure you have a safe and private location to participate in counseling. Due to the nature of electronic communication, I cannot guarantee that our communication will remain confidential despite my best efforts to use updated encryption methods and antivirus software. Clients should use secure networks and password-protected devices and accounts. Clients should encrypt their Android phones if used for telemental health purposes (iPhones are encrypted) and should not share their passwords with others. Clients must have a safe and private location in which they can participate in telemental health counseling.
- **Boundaries**—Counselors avoid dual relationships with clients as much as possible. Clients should be mindful of what the counselor can observe in the background of their videos. The use of substances before or during session is strictly prohibited.
- **Access Issues**—We will decide together what type of telemental health platform to use; clients are responsible to obtain access to a reliable device for communication and a secure network. Clients can access public telemental health devices and networks at their local libraries, and they should take steps to ensure their privacy and confidentiality is

maintained through use of a virtual private network (VPN), encryption, and/or password protection.

- Not Appropriate for All Clients—Some clients might not be able to engage in telemental health counseling due to the nature and severity of client concerns, issues of access, or other unique circumstances. If I decide that telemental health counseling is no longer the best treatment option for you, we will discuss in-person counseling or referral options. You understand that referral services might not be available immediately.
- Crisis Response—Telemental health counseling is not a substitute for emergency services. We will develop an emergency response plan before engaging in telemental health counseling. Clients are responsible for seeking and securing their own emergency services despite any guidance or support offered by the counselor.
- Effectiveness—Although telemental health counseling has been found to produce effective results, it is quite different than in-person counseling, and some nonverbal communication might be lost.
- Technology Failure—Sometimes technology might fail. In the event of a lost connection during session, the counselor and client will log off, wait two minutes, and try to reconnect. If the connection fails again, the counselor will call the client on their permanent phone number. If the session is interrupted and you are in crisis, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room. If a session is ended due to technological failure, you will be charged a prorated amount of actual session time and the session will be rescheduled.
- Time Zones—If we are located in different time zones, I will ensure that we are both informed of meeting times in our own time zones. Some appointments might need to be scheduled outside of typical business hours, and I will do my best to schedule at times that are convenient for you.
- Diversity—I work with diverse clients who hold various cultural values, native languages, and levels of ability. I will adjust telemental health services according to your unique needs, and we will make alternative arrangements if telemental health is not suitable.
- Third-Party Payers—not all insurance companies and other managed-care providers will reimburse for telemental health counseling services. We will work together to get an estimate of what will be reimbursed before beginning services, and you will be responsible for the full cost of session if the agreed-upon fee is not reimbursed by a third party as expected.

Electronic Communication Policy

I do not use social media for professional purposes. I do not communicate or connect with any clients through social media platforms. I have a website that you may access for information. You can access your personal information and get appointment reminders through the secure client portal. Login information will be sent to you via email. Posting about the nature of our relationship on any public site compromises your confidentiality. If I see you in person, I will not address you unless you acknowledge me first.

Email communication is best for logistical issues such as making and changing appointments and billing questions. Text messaging is not secure, so please email or call instead. I will return text messages with a phone call. I will respond to your messages within 48 hours. Client should call emergency services for any urgent needs.

Fees

The same fee structure applies to telemental health counseling as in-person counseling. However, some insurance companies or managed care providers might not reimburse telemental health counseling session fees. If your third-party payer does not cover telemental health counseling services, you will be solely responsible for the entire session fee. Please contact your third-party payer to determine whether telemental health counseling sessions will be covered, and at what rate.

Records

I will maintain HIPAA-compliant records of our counseling relationship and your protected health information (PHI) using a cloud-based platform with a signed Business Associate Agreement (BAA). This cloud-based platform is where you can access your personal information, scheduling information, and appointment reminders. I use encrypted email and a password-protected, encrypted telephone to communicate with you. I retain confidential record of all written communication we exchange (including email and text) for seven years.

Telemental health counseling sessions should not be recorded without the written consent of both counselor and client.

You agree to inform me of your exact location and to confirm your identity before the start of every telemental health counseling session. Your identity will be confirmed using a government-issued ID at the first session, and we will use a code word to confirm your identity in subsequent sessions. If you are using a third-party payer, please know that I will use a billing service with a signed BAA. Other individuals with authorized access to your PHI might include administrative professionals, supervisors, and information technologists, all of whom are HIPAA-compliant.

Agreement

This policy is intended as a supplement to my standard Professional Disclosure Statement and does not change or negate any of the terms of that agreement. You may stop session and withdraw your consent to receive telemental health counseling services at any time. Your signature below indicates agreement with this policy.

Client

Date

Counselor

Date