

Tips for Effective Use of Tele-Behavioral Health

The tips in this document have been gathered from experts around Idaho as well as some providers who are relatively new to telehealth. These professionals have been kind enough to share what they have learned to help all of us adjust and make the most of serving consumers via telehealth.

Read more about tele-behavioral health in the [Telehealth Information and Resource Guide](#).

Technology Tips

- Set up your webcam at or slightly above your eye level. This placement ensures that you appear to be on the “same level” as your client. Avoid placing the webcam below your eye level as that will make it appear that you are looking down at your client. Proper camera placement helps avoid reinforcing the unavoidable, inherent power differential that exists between behavioral health professionals and consumers.
- Use a room link rather than an event link. Depending on the platform you use for telehealth, you may have access to a room link that is static— it’s the same link every time. Using your room link rather than an event link can be useful if you need a supervisor or another professional to step in. They can be sent the link and join the session in the same way that they might otherwise be able to walk into your office and observe or talk with your client.
 - Make sure to engage in the informed consent process and get your client’s permission as usual.
 - Also ensure you have enabled the option to manually admit people into the room so none of your other clients accidentally enter someone else’s session (this is akin to closing your office door).
- Use a headset with a microphone to minimize noise feedback/echoes (and decrease the chance of your client being overheard).
- Have a practice session with a colleague or friend prior to holding sessions, so you have a chance to work out any audio or visual problems and to help ensure a quality experience for your client.
- If you are struggling with bandwidth issues, use phone audio rather than computer audio, which takes the audio load off your internet. This audio option does not eliminate problems with bandwidth, but it can help. You can also walk your client through audio options.
- Research and share with your client free apps, such as mindfulness and breathing apps or mood tracking apps. These apps can be helpful complements to your client’s recovery journey.

Session tips

- Complete tele-behavioral health specific trainings before holding sessions if possible.
- Mind your surroundings.
 - Ensure your background appears professional and is not distracting.
 - Minimize background sounds.
 - Make sure you use a room from which you can assure HIPAA compliant privacy/confidentiality for your client.
- Acknowledge from the beginning that this way of conducting sessions is a little bit strange. You and your client can then agree to both “pretend” that you are in the same room.
- Find out *exactly* where the individual is at the beginning of EACH session so if you need to send emergency services, you will know where to send them. If you are running a group, have them each send you their exact location privately via the chat feature or in another confidential way.
- Make sure you know who else is in earshot on your client’s end of things. Is there someone in the room with them? In the next room? You may need to adjust what you say based on privacy needs. Encourage them to find a private location if they can, of course, but that may not always be possible.
 - Some providers ask for this information and ask the client to use their webcam to show their surroundings.

Reluctant client tips

- If you have a client who is reluctant to use video technology for their sessions and you are unable to meet in person, here are some ideas. Some of these will be more or less relevant depending upon the reason for your client’s discomfort.
 - Try test calls/video calls with them before their actual session to help them gain comfort with the technology.
 - Remind them that you do not record sessions.
 - Remind them of your ethical and legal obligation, as well as your professional commitment to ensuring their information remains protected and confidential (noting caveats regarding safety concerns that should be part of the informed consent process).
 - Be consistent with your visual space so they may gain comfort with it over time.

- Shut down all distractions around you so you can keep your attention on your client and not appear to be attending to anything else. For instance, do not have email or websites up on your screen(s), turn off the TV, put your smartphone in a drawer, close the door, etc.
- Transition to tele-behavioral health by first only speaking on the phone, and then graduate to include video.

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- Lana Schuerman, LPC, ACADC, DBH Clinician running Mental Health Court treatment for Latah County via telehealth.

Resources found online:

- [Telebehavioral Health Institute](#) – Ethical Statements
- [Counseling in a Time of COVID-19](#) - American Counseling Association
- [Policy Regarding the Provision of Distance Professional Services](#) - National Board for [Certified Counselors Code of Ethics](#)
- [COVID-19 Ethics Resources](#) - National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics
- [SUD-Specific Resources](#) – Association for Addiction Professionals Code of Ethics
- [American Counseling Association \(ACA\) 2014 Code of Ethics](#) – See Section H, Distance Counseling, pg. 17-18)
- [Policy Regarding the Provision of Distance Professional Services](#) – National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)