

Telepsychology Informed Consent

Telepsychology is the delivery of mental health care through interactive technologies (audio, video or other electronic communications) between a practitioner and a client who are not in the same location.

Telepsychology comes with both benefits and risks. Benefits include convenience and continuity of care when either a client or practitioner changes their location. Many clients find that it is less stressful to have sessions from home. Since there is no need to travel to a practitioner's office there is also the privacy offered by not entering a therapist's office. Sometimes, clients are more relaxed in the comfort of home and find the distance helps in sharing difficult feelings.

There are risks, however, in using technology for therapy sessions. Some of these risks include; breaches in confidentiality, theft of personal information, and disruption of our sessions due to technical difficulties. There is also the risk that someone may enter your space while you are in session.

Some clients may have an emotional reaction to sharing their feelings through technology and may have a reaction to not having a therapist in the room with them as they process their feelings.

To minimize these risks, we will use only secure HIPAA approved sites for our sessions and for the storage of all of your information. I ask that you communicate with me via my secure client portal and not through regular email or texting, as these are not HIPAA approved means of communication.

Prior to initiating telepsychology, you should consider how it will be for you to work remotely and to share feelings over the phone or online. It is also important for you to think about how it will be for you to deal with emergencies in your care, remotely. Before beginning our work together, we will spend time assessing these issues and decide whether telepsychology is in your best interest.

It is also your responsibility to ensure that you will have privacy for your session and that your environment will not distract you from your work in therapy. We tend to multi-task while at home and this is another risk of telepsychology. During our sessions please follow the same guidelines that you would use in the confines of my office. This means avoiding multi-tasking in any form such as checking emails, receiving text messages, answering questions from household members or caring for pets. I understand that pets are often helpful in the therapy process and please think about whether having your pets in the room with you helps you to better use your therapy time or whether it is a distraction. Also, to ensure your privacy, make sure that other devices which could potentially record your session are turned off.

If we have a disruption of service that interrupts our session, as long as I have cellular service, I will call you to continue our session or to reschedule. If I do not have cell service, I will call as soon as I have it.

Should you decide that you need in person therapy, rather than telepsychology, I will gladly assist you in this process. Ultimately, it will be your responsibility to find a practitioner in your area with whom you feel comfortable continuing your therapy work.

Therapy is an investment of your time and resources. Let's make sure to make that investment count!

Online Therapy – Creating a confidential space

Please read this to be sure that you have a safe and confidential space for our sessions.

Make sure the space for our sessions is private. This means:

- The door is locked, if possible.
- If not, you have let others know that you need privacy and they have agreed to respect this. You might consider a sign on the door as a reminder.
- If you don't believe that others will respect your privacy, this spot will not be a good place for our sessions. See below for ideas on that.

Make sure that others cannot hear our conversation outside of your space or room.

- You might consider creating some type of white noise with a fan or other type of white noise machine outside the door to the room.
- Please, also consider using headphones or earbuds so that your provider's voice is kept private and can only be heard by you.

Make sure that your spot is comfortable.

Ideas for finding private space

If you don't have a room that is private, just for you, are there rooms in your house that are less often used or that could create privacy?

I often use my walk-in closet to meditate or do other emotional work. I have a comfy chair in there and it's a place where I won't be disturbed.

Attics or basement rooms could also be good choices.

If the weather is conducive, a car parked someplace in a location where you are not likely to be disturbed is another option. Please be sure you will be safe in this spot.

It is hard – well really impossible - to do effective work in therapy when you are not comfortable or when you are worried that someone will overhear your conversation.

For these reasons, please take some time with setting this up.

Think of this set-up work as part of your therapy session.

There are also some technical aspects that can help our session to run smoothly.

Device

- Whatever device that you choose to use for our sessions, be sure the camera is as level with your eyes, as possible, and that it is stable. This may require stacking your device on something to elevate it – maybe a stack of books.
- A laptop or desktop computer are ideal for our sessions. It is important that you can comfortably see me.
- If you are using a tablet or a phone, be sure to prop so that it is stable and with these devices it will be especially important to find a way to get the camera as level, as you can, with your eyes.
- I want to be able to see you, so be sure you have good lighting - but avoid a bright light source directly behind you.

Internet connection

We will have the smoothest connection for our sessions if you:

- are as close as possible to your WiFi router. Or, if possible, use a cable to plug your computer into your router.
- close any programs that you don't need, which use your internet connection.
- some important ones to close are, Skype, Dropbox, Google drive and other file sharing services, and Cloud backup software. Even though you may not be actively using these programs, they may be working in the background. Same goes for websites, especially those with ads that update.
- make sure that your antivirus software isn't programmed to run during your session.

There are definitely factors we won't be able to control, like the weather, which might interrupt our online sessions, and taking these steps should help to avoid many unnecessary disruptions.

With gratitude for your attention to this!