

Make the Most of your Teletherapy!

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Tips for clients and potential clients to have an excellent virtual therapy experience

Virtual sessions with your mental health provider have pros and cons. It may be more convenient for you, or you may even feel more comfortable with the additional distance. For most types of coaching, and many kinds of more structured therapy, the virtual environment doesn't make much difference. On the other hand, many therapists and clients feel that it is more difficult to create the rich growth promoting climate necessary for some kinds of therapy work and miss the in person *resonance* available in a face to face meeting. Here are some tips for getting the most out of your experience, no matter what kind of therapy you are doing:

Before you Begin:

- You should have received an informed consent document that explains the fundamental processes of therapy, the laws and rules governing confidentiality, logistical information such as expectations and fees, and online therapy in particular
- Your therapist should have spoken with you by phone or communicated by email to give you instructions for using the telehealth platform, including what to expect if there are technological complications during session and how to pay your fee (this is often by credit card on file, but check with your therapist)
- You should have received intake paperwork to fill out – it is very helpful if you fill all of that out as completely as possible and send it to your therapist before your first session

What to Know:

- It's your therapist's job to protect your confidentiality, even when it doesn't seem like a big deal to you, and confidentiality is more limited in a telehealth environment. So, please choose a space to have your session that is as private as possible, where you can be alone without interruptions.
- Remember that when you come to a therapy session, you get to present yourself however you wish. You may not feel comfortable with your therapist seeing your pile of laundry, your wedding photos, etc., so consider that when choosing your location.
- Even though you are interacting with your therapist in perhaps the same place and way that you interact with others (e.g., friends and family), remember that the therapist/client relationship is special. Your therapist wants to be able to be there for you, to be a stable presence in your life. This means that they will not be available for texts or videochats any time. To be able to be that stable presence, therapy needs to be limited to the designated time (e.g., to reduce the danger of not being available if you were to text in a crisis).

What to Tell Your Therapist:

- Please tell your therapist where you are physically located at the beginning of each session. This helps the therapist be certain to have emergency resources near you if necessary, and helps to structure your session to your environment
- Please tell your therapist who is in the room/building with you at the beginning of each session. Nosy parents, controlling partners, and colicky infants are all things that your therapist can accommodate, but not if they don't know who is there!
- Mention any technical issues that you have (difficulty hearing, frozen screen, lag time, etc.) immediately, rather than waiting to see if it clears up on its own. That will help your therapist manage it efficiently and maximize your time together.

How to Set Up Your Space:

- Choose a space that has a comfortable chair or couch, like a face-to-face session might have. Don't do your telehealth session in the car or walking around, or otherwise "multitasking."
- Limit distractions. This includes your pets, who have a tendency to jump in at inopportune moments. And you'll want to put your phone/email/etc. into Do-Not-Disturb mode. And please avoid substance use before and during your session!
- Please set up your camera so that your therapist has a clear, well-lit view of your face and upper body, without looking up or down at you. (And if your therapist is not giving you this view, just ask them to!) Preferably, set your camera up somewhere so that you don't have to hold it all session.
- Nearby, you'll want to have pen/pencil and paper, possibly tissues, and the charging cords for your device.
- More than anything, you want to have a physical and mental space where you can *be real* and treat the session as much like an in-person session as possible.