

COVID-19 Telemental Health Services Informed Consent

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Overview

- ❖ During the extraordinary crisis of COVID-19, many health insurance companies are making exceptions to long standing policies by extending benefits to cover the use of Telehealth for mental health services. Thereby allowing you to continue with therapy for your usual payment (copay or deductible payment). It is possible, and likely, that these benefits may not be available once the crisis has subsided.
- ❖ You will need access to certain technological services and tools to engage in telemental health-based services with me.
- ❖ Telemental health has both benefits and risks, which you and I will be monitoring as we proceed with your work.
- ❖ You can stop work by telemental health at any time without prejudice.
- ❖ You will need to participate in creating an appropriate space for your telemental health sessions.
- ❖ You will need to participate in making a plan for managing technology failures, mental health crises, and medical emergencies.
- ❖ I follow security best practices and legal standards in order to protect your health care information, but you will also need to participate in maintaining your own security and privacy.

What is Telemental Health? “Telemental health” means, in short, “the use of interactive audio, video or other electronic media for the purposes of diagnosis, consultation or treatment.” It refers to the provision of mental health services with the

provider and the recipient of services being in separate locations, and the services being delivered over electronic media.

Services delivered via telemental health rely on a number of electronic, often Internet-based, technology tools. These tools can include videoconferencing software, email, text messaging, virtual environments, specialized mobile health (“mHealth”) apps, and others.

Video services such as Skype, Facetime, GoToMeeting, and Google audio/video systems are not 100% secure and therefore I do not use them. I use doxy.me for video conferencing as they are HIPAA-secure, thus providing a higher likelihood of preserving your privacy (nothing is 100% secure). You may have to download a program onto your device (laptop, desktop, or tablet) in order to have a video session with me.

I typically provide telemental health services using the following tools:

doxy.me

You will need access to Internet service and technological tools needed to use the above- listed tools in order to engage in telemental health work with me.

If you have any questions or concerns about the above tool, please address them directly to me so we can discuss their risks, benefits, and specific application to your treatment.

Benefits and Risks of Telemental Health

Receiving services via telemental health allows you to:

Receive services at times or in places where the service may not otherwise be available.

Receive services in a fashion that may be more convenient and less prone to delays than in-person meetings.

Receive services when you are unable to travel to my office. The unique characteristics of telemental health media may also help some people make improved progress on health goals that may not have been otherwise achievable

without telemental health.

Receiving services via telemental health has the following risks: Telemental health services can be impacted by technical failures, may introduce risks to your privacy, and may reduce my ability to directly intervene in crises or emergencies. Here is a non-exhaustive list of examples:

Internet connections and cloud services could cease working or become too unstable to use

Cloud-based service personnel, IT assistants, and malicious actors (“hackers”) may have the ability to access your private information that is transmitted or stored in the process of telemental health-based service delivery.

Computer or smartphone hardware can have sudden failures or run out of power, or local power services can go out.

Interruptions may disrupt services at important moments, and I may be unable to reach you quickly or using the most effective tools. I may also be unable to help you in-person.

There may be additional benefits and risks to telemental health services that arise from the lack of in-person contact or presence, the distance between you and me at the time of service, and the technological tools used to deliver services. I will assess these potential benefits and risks, sometimes in collaboration with you, as our relationship progresses.

Assessing Telemental Health’s Fit For You

Although it is well validated by research, service delivery via telemental health is not a good fit for every person. I will continuously assess if working via telemental health is appropriate for your case. If it is not appropriate, I will help you find in-person providers with whom to continue services.

Please talk to me if you find the telemental health media so difficult to use that it distracts from the services being provided, if the medium causes trouble focusing on your services, or if there are any other reasons why the telemental health medium seems to be causing problems in receiving services. **Raising your questions or concerns will not, by itself, result in termination of services.** Bringing your concerns to me is often a part of the process.

You also have a right to stop receiving services by telemental health at any time without prejudice. If you are reasonably able to access my in-person services, you will not be prevented from accessing those services if you choose to stop using telemental health.

Telemental Health in my practice

The content of video sessions can include ongoing assessment, consultation, treatment planning, and therapy. I am not licensed to practice psychology in any state other than North Carolina. There may be certain limited conditions under which you and I can use video to “meet” while you are in another state; I will consider these on a case-by-case basis. Telemental health is not usually covered by insurance, however, due to the Covid-19 crisis most insurance companies are extending coverage.

Your Telemental Health Environment

You will be responsible for creating a safe and confidential space during sessions. You should use a space that is free of other people. It should also be difficult or impossible for people outside the space to see or hear your interactions with me during the session. If you are unsure of how to do this, please ask me for assistance.

Our Communication Plan

At our first session, we will develop a plan for backup communications in case of technology failures and a plan for responding to emergencies and mental health crises. In addition to those plans, I have the following policies regarding communications:

The best way to contact me between sessions is to email me at wendy@wendyhillcounseling.com or call/text me at 919/924-9675.

I will respond to your messages as promptly as possible but please note that I may respond more slowly on evenings and weekends.

As always if you are in crisis and unable to reach me please go to your local emergency room or dial 911.

Our work is done during our appointed sessions. Contact between sessions should be limited to:

Confirming or changing appointment times

Billing questions or issues

I may coordinate care with one or more of your other providers. I will use reasonable care to ensure that those communications are secure and that they safeguard your privacy.

Our Safety and Emergency Plan

As a recipient of telemental health-based services, you will need to participate in ensuring your safety during mental health crises, medical emergencies, and sessions that you have with me.

I will require you to designate an emergency contact. You will need to provide permission for me to communicate with this person about your care during emergencies.

I will also develop with you a plan for what to do during mental health crises and emergencies, and a plan for how to keep your space safe during sessions. It is important that you engage with me in the creation of these plans and that you follow them when you need to.

Your Security and Privacy

Except where otherwise noted, I employ software and hardware tools that adhere to security best practices and applicable legal standards for the purposes of protecting your privacy and ensuring that records of your health care services are not lost or damaged.

As with all things in telemental health, however, you also have a role to play in maintaining your security. Please use reasonable security protocols to protect the privacy of your own health care information. For example: when communicating with me, use devices and service accounts that are protected by unique passwords that only you know.

The laws that protect the confidentiality of your personal information apply just as much to video sessions as they do to in-person psychotherapy. That is, the information released by you during the course of your sessions is generally confidential. There are

both mandatory and permissive exceptions to confidentiality: child or vulnerable adult abuse; expressed intent to harm yourself or others; or as a part of legal proceedings where information is requested by a court of law. With those exceptions, I will never convey any personally identifiable images or information from our video interaction to other entities without your written authorization, except as permitted by HIPAA for purposes of coordination of care. An example of the latter would be telling your psychiatrist what I notice to be the effect of your medication.

Recordings

Please do not record video or audio sessions without my consent. Making recordings can quickly and easily compromise your privacy, and should be done only with great care. I will not record video or audio sessions.

I understand and agree to the above policies and procedures.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

