Telemental Health Tip Sheets

Transitioning to Telemental Health: Your First Appointment

Using technology to deliver mental health services may be new to you. Below are some helpful tips to consider as you adapt to new telemental health technology solutions for service delivery. For additional resources and updates on how the COVID-19 public health emergency affects the delivery of behavioral health services in New York State, please visit **https://ctacny.org/covid-19-resources**.

1. While **scheduling your first telemental health appointment**, ask the individual:

    1. How are you doing?

    2. What concerns do you have transitioning your sessions to telemental health?

    3. Do you have a working cell phone, landline, or computer?

    4. Do you have internet access in your home or on a smartphone?

    5. Are you comfortable with technology? What would work best for you for our appointments?

    6. Do you have a safe, quiet, and private space to meet?

2. Assess what the individual knows or doesn't know about the current crisis. Ask them what they are doing to **stay safe** and if they have any questions. Emphasize that safety is the main reason for the transition to telemental health.

3. It is important to assess the **individual's willingness** to engage in virtual appointments. Remind them that this is new to everyone and that you will take it on together. Some individuals may be hesitant to engage in telehealth services or have negative associations with the internet or technology due to past experiences such as being taken advantage of online or addictions to social media, gaming, etc., so be prepared to address these concerns.

4. Explain and discuss **expectations**. Holding virtual appointments by phone or video conference can be strange at first, but remain positive. Acknowledge doubts, concerns and limitations, but emphasize that you are looking forward to working with them as well as benefits of the new technology. Clients trust the opinion of providers and if they have positive expectations going into the process, they are more likely to engage with the new setup and experience positive outcomes. If virtual sessions are new for both of you, the shared experience of adjusting to the new medium can strengthen feelings of trust and cooperation within the client-provider relationship.

5. Express the importance of **holding sessions and this relationship**. Technology has its advantages and disadvantages. Staying connected is certainly an advantage during these challenging times. Make the technology personal when communicating with the individual by using words like 'we', 'our', or 'your.'

6. Acknowledge the **limitations** of telemental health. Ask the individual if they feel they have enough privacy and feel safe to participate in therapy. Are there topics that are difficult to discuss given the proximity to partners, roommates, children, etc.?

7. Emphasize the importance of the **original service plan** and talk through which of the goals are still feasible. Ask the individual what they would like to prioritize and what is most important to them right now. It is okay to establish new goals to address something that has come up due to the current crisis.

8. **Check in** and ask if the individual feels that their needs are being met. If they are not, work collaboratively to discuss how to reduce barriers. Consider making changes based on the person's answers. You can ask 'What can I do for our work to feel most helpful?' It should be clear to clients that they are involved in this new process and their experience is an important consideration when making changes to the new system.

9. Take time to reflect on **your own experience**. What went well? What should change? How can you prepare differently?

10. Before concluding the session, take a moment to **summarize** the session and **plan** the next one. Take into account the person's preferences and feedback.

References

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