

Getting the Most Out of Your Telehealth Group Sessions: Tips for Providers

Establish Expectations

1. Collaborate with each patient to discuss expectations for telehealth sessions and how these may be similar or different from in-person sessions. Discuss why you all are choosing to use this therapy venue versus another.
2. Be sure to determine which patients are appropriate for telehealth group therapy services. Will an individual benefit from full-time telehealth care or a mix of in-person and tele-sessions, as appropriate? Is the patient at risk? Do they have adequate access to technology and support?
3. How will you obtain paperwork and homework assignments from the patients? Will these be made readily accessible via a central website or an email?

Before and During Sessions

1. Explain Informed Consent and obtain a signed Telehealth Informed Consent Form from each individual patient/group member. Sample forms that may be adapted to your practice may be found here: <https://www.agpa.org/home/practice-resources/connecting-online>
2. Discuss the potential risks and benefits of teletherapy and emphasize that you will not be physically available to the patients or at the same site as the patients during sessions.
3. Identify where and when sessions will most likely take place for each group member.
4. Set a scheduled time for a preliminary familiarization with technology and a “test run” with the patients, remembering to let them know that this is to test out your electronic connection and is not a formal therapy session.
5. Make sure you have a working webcam and alternate connection, whether via video or audio, just in case you are disconnected. Make sure the patients have a telephone number to reach you at and/or you have a number where you can reach the patient should you become disconnected at any time during session.
6. Emphasize that there will be NO recording permitted of the group teletherapy sessions in order to preserve confidentiality for all patients.

7. Establish Safety. Obtain a physical location of where the patient is during the group session. In cases where a patient endorses suicide risk, it may be appropriate to have the patient remain online following the group and determine if a supportive family member or friend might be present. In such cases, obtain a release or permission from the patient to speak with that trusted individual, in order to enlist them in helping to keep the patient safe.
8. As part of the safety planning process, be sure to assess for access to lethal means and discuss securing items of concern.
9. Provide all clients with a list of Emergency Contact numbers and resources that are LOCAL to them.
10. Schedule the session and send a secure link to your patients on an encrypted line or with password access to ensure web security.
11. Make sure your software is updated. Check for location, sound, and lighting prior to session start. At the beginning of each session, determine each patient's location again and offer a reminder of an alternative number in case of technical disruption.

Group Teletherapy References

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