

Agreement for Telehealth Services

The Digital Age continues to facilitate new ways to assist people to meet their mental health needs. We are happy to move in step with technological advancements to provide telehealth services. As part of our commitment to your well-being and safety, a few guidelines should be discussed. Please read this carefully.

Telehealth

Variouly dubbed telemedicine, teletherapy, distance therapy, e-therapy, internet therapy, or online therapy, "telehealth" is defined as the use of electronic transmission to provide interactive real-time mental health services remotely, including consultation, assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, counseling, psychotherapy, coaching, guidance, education, and transfer of medical information with an experienced psychotherapist. This can include both video and audio forms of communication, via the internet or telephone. Telehealth services do not include texting or e-mail.

Office Agreements

Telehealth is governed by all the same ethics and laws that cover in-office, in-person, face-to-face psychological service. So, all other policies and consents in the psychotherapist's office agreement forms apply to telehealth services. This document is an addendum to, and does not substitute for, our standard in-office services agreements.

Advantages & Disadvantages

The advantage of telehealth is that it can flexibly provide continuity of care when an in-person treatment session cannot be conducted in the office. Similar to a regular in-person therapy session, telehealth allows for both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Telehealth is not a universal substitute, nor the same as, in-person psychological service. Some people say that telehealth services do not have the same level of comfort and may not seem as complete when talking about personal and private matters. Misunderstandings can more easily occur. This may impact the professional therapeutic relationship. Like in-person psychotherapy, telehealth services are never guaranteed.

Prerequisites

Telehealth is not suited to all circumstances. Telehealth is only part of your psychotherapy. Telehealth services in this office are only provided to previously established patients who continue to have at least intermittent in-person sessions in the office. Initial consultations are in-person in the office only.

Telehealth requires reasonable comfort with technology.

Telehealth is best for augmenting in-person services when the patient is unable to come in to the physical office location due to temporary limitations. Examples of temporary limitations include medical conditions limiting physical mobility, distance due to travel, and scheduling conflicts.

In this office, periodic in-person check-ups are required. Ideally, it is recommended we meet in-person in the office in order to provide optimal care. If periodic in-person sessions are recommended and cannot be scheduled, the psychotherapist will discuss referral to another appropriate provider.

In extreme circumstances where services reasonably should not be provided remotely, your psychotherapist may recommend coming in to the office, waiting until you can come into the office, or referring you to a psychotherapist who can provide such services locally.

Professional services are being provided under a license issued by and limited to practice within the state of California. Therefore, the patient affirms they reside in the state of California at the time of telehealth services.

Emergencies

Telehealth is not recommended for a psychological emergency. Telehealth services are only provided when it is unlikely that a mental health emergency could arise during the session. Overwhelming or potentially dangerous challenges are best addressed with in-person professional support. In the event that in-person sessions are recommended due to symptom severity, the patient is asked to arrangements for an in-person session.

Just like in-person services, if an emergency should occur during a telehealth session, the psychotherapist may consider taking any steps necessary to ensure the safety of the patient or of others.

Scheduling

Just like an in-person appointment, telehealth sessions are scheduled in advance by prior arrangement.

Scheduling a telehealth appointment involves reserving time specifically for you. Just like in-person appointments, you are responsible for keeping all telehealth appointments.

We should usually start and end on time. In all telehealth sessions, the therapist will initiate the telehealth session, unless other arrangements have been made. A window will remain open around the starting time of your appointment. Just like an in-person session, if your psychotherapist doesn't hear from you, they will attempt to reach you but will discontinue after several attempts.

Cancellations and unkept appointments are treated just like in-person cancellations and unkept appointments. The psychotherapist is not responsible for the patient's ability to participate in the session, including technological limitations.

Confidentiality

The laws that protect the confidentiality of your medical information in the office also apply to telehealth sessions, including mandatory and permissive exceptions to confidentiality.

The patient and psychotherapist both agree to keep the same privacy safeguards as during an in-person session. The environment should be free from unexpected or unauthorized intrusions or disruptions to our communication. There is a risk of being overheard by a third party near you if you do not conduct the session in an enclosed private room, with reasonable sound barriers, and with no one else present or observing.

The patient and psychotherapist both agree to not record the telehealth sessions without prior written consent of both parties.

Consent

You have the right to opt in or opt out of the methods of telehealth communication at any time, without affecting your right to future care or treatment.

It is your responsibility to discuss prior to the telehealth session which medium will be used, how to use it, and any necessary login codes.

Security

No electronic transmission system is considered completely safe from intrusion. Interception of communication by third parties remains technically possible.

Due to the complexities of electronic media and the internet, risks of telehealth include the potential for release of private information, including audio and images. So, your psychotherapist cannot fully guarantee the security of telehealth sessions. You are responsible for information security on your computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone. As a policy, we ask for your agreement to not electronically record telehealth sessions without prior written consent.

We attempt to use the most secure telehealth platforms available for providing service to you. However, you may elect to use less secure methods. In so choosing, you should understand you are accepting responsibility for the security of that telehealth platform.

For the safety of the client, we ask that you do not operate a motor vehicle during a telehealth session. Sessions can be emotional and can distract from focusing on the road.

I have read and understand the information provided above. I have discussed it with my psychotherapist. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby request and consent to telehealth services as a part of my treatment. I agree to abide by the terms of this agreement.

While a variety of software programs are available for video conferencing, such as Skype, Facetime, or GoToMeeting, not all are encrypted, or compliant with Federal law to protect the privacy of your health communication. We use software with encryption to maximize your confidentiality.

Telephone

Telehealth can include telephone sessions. When using the telephone, remember to be in a place you feel comfortable speaking about personal and private matters. If you are using a cellular telephone, remember that not all calls or telephones are absolutely secure and may be compromised by various detection devices. A landline is preferable because it is more secure, more reliable, and often offers clearer audio quality.

Video Conferencing

The patient is responsible for their own hardware, software, and connectivity. At the time of the telehealth appointment, it is your responsibility to have your electronic device on, video conferencing software launched, and be ready to start the session at the time of the scheduled telehealth appointment.

Before an initial telehealth session, a test call up to 10 minutes can be arranged to ensure that technology is functioning properly. If a video telehealth session is blocked after several reasonable attempts, be open to having a telephone session for that time.

Session Etiquette

In telehealth therapy, you may participate from your home, so your attention on the session is all the more essential. Therefore, as during an in-person session, we request that you dress appropriately, avoid consuming food or alcohol, limit disruptions from phones or other screens, stay in front of your camera, and keep others from entering or overhearing.

Payment

Just like in-person services, telehealth services are a professional service, and a fee is charged at the same rate as in-person services.

Even when health insurance covers in-person services, health insurance may limit or deny coverage of telehealth services. You are responsible to confirm and know in advance what your insurance may or may not cover. If your insurance does not cover telehealth services, you will personally be responsible for full payment.

Patient Signature

Patient Name

Psychologist Signature

Date

Preparing for Telehealth Services

Below are steps we recommend in preparing for your initial telehealth session. Please read this carefully. If you have any questions, please contact your therapist in advance of your first telehealth appointment.

Hardware

You are responsible to provide your own hardware and software, audio and video peripherals, and internet connection.

Software

In our office, we use VSee videoconferencing software. VSee downloaded from www.vsee.com is free and allows secure communication via text, screen share, picture share, and real-time audio/video. So, it is fully compliant with federal telecommunication security protocols.

VSee runs on most common computer operating systems, and most hardware including desktop computer, laptop, tablet, or cellular telephone.

Set-Up

Telehealth videoconferencing can take increased set-up time and requires reasonable comfort with technology. Please test all of your systems and technical capabilities ahead of time.

Before your first session with the therapist, we recommend that you ensure that your software and hardware are working together properly and that you know how to operate them. Confirm your internet connection and wireless router are fast enough to provide a full signal and won't be saturated.

We recommend you shut down all unnecessary other programs and apps before installation. Go to www.vsee.com and download the free "messenger" software.

Despite VSee being very simple, learn the basic menus, try all the features, test your settings. Click on "Settings," then "Audio and Camera Setup." Make sure that your camera and microphone are working.

Make sure to set your camera, speaker/earphones, and microphone to the proper defaults, both on your device and in the VSee software.

Provide your therapist with your VSee contact e-mail address. Your therapist's VSee contact address is JJDeSantis@aol.com. Enter this e-mail address under the "Contacts" tab in the software.

Test Call

Before an initial telehealth session, a test call up to 10 minutes can be arranged with your therapist to ensure that technology is functioning.

Appointments

Just like an in-person appointment, schedule your telehealth session in advance.

Your therapist will initiate the call at the appointment time.

Guidelines for Your Session

Please dress as you would for an in-person appointment.

For your privacy, make sure your session is in a private place, free from distraction or intrusion. A room with a door that closes is best. For your privacy, we recommend using a earphones rather than a speakerphone and avoid being in range of voice-activated devices like Alexa. Please let me know if someone else is in the room.

Aim your camera. Check your camera angle. Avoid positioning your camera too low or too high. Check to see that your face can be seen. Try to fill the screen as much as possible. Confirm there is plenty of even light with minimal glare. Avoid bright lights directly behind your head to avoid "blowing out" the image and turning you into a silhouette.

The most important part of a video conference is not the video—it is the audio. To maximize audio quality, freedom from extraneous noise, and privacy, a headset or earbuds may be better than a speaker and microphone.

Speak in your normal voice, without shouting.

Avoid "double talk." Double talk is when both people talk at the same time. Double talk may cause audio feedback and echo. Allow the other person to finish speaking before you speak. Since audio has a very slight delay, you may want to pause briefly for the therapist to respond or to make comments.

10-15 minutes before the appointment time, have your device on, video conferencing software launched, and be ready to start the session. Ensure you have enough battery or else plug-in to avoid a dropped call.

Your therapist will initiate the call at the start time.

Distortion or Disruption

If the connection is distorted or interrupted by a technical malfunction, we may reconnect and try again. If for any reason you are having a technical malfunction, I can call you on the phone and walk you through getting reconnected. If a video telehealth session is blocked after several reasonable attempts, please be open to having a telephone session for that time.

Downloading & Setting Up Telehealth Software

Please follow these instructions to obtain and set up your free encrypted software to prepare for your upcoming internet video-conference session with your psychologist. You can use this software on any device—a cell phone, tablet, laptop computer, or desktop computer.

A Day Before Your Appointment

You can use any digital device: cell phone, tablet, laptop computer, or desktop computer.

Use the best connection you have available. Sometimes a smartphone connection will be faster and the picture will be sharper than on a laptop or desktop machine.

Turn on your device.

Shut down all unnecessary other programs before the session.

Open your e-mail.

You should have received an e-mail invitation from your psychologist to connect with you on VSee.

Follow the instruction in your e-mail to accept your psychologist's invitation and sign up.

If at any time you see a statement on the VSee.com website that the VSee software is not available or requires a fee, please understand that you are my client and therefore, you are always granted free access.

Follow the prompts to download the software, create an account, and login.

Enter your name, e-mail address, & a password of your choice to create an account and login.

If you still don't know what to do, contact your psychologist for guidance. He can walk you through the process in about 5 minutes.

Write down your password somewhere that is safe, so that if you need it later, you will have it available.

You are now finished and ready to start a VSee session at the appointment time.

You can thereafter always launch the VSee software from your device by clicking on the green "V" icon.

10 Minutes Before Your Appointment

A few minutes before your appointment time, launch your VSee software by clicking on the green "V" icon.

Wait for your psychologist to "call" you via the software to start the session.

Your psychologist will "call" you at the appointment time.

Your software will start to "ring."

Answer the incoming video call by clicking the green "Accept" button.

Your session will begin.