Telehealth tips for therapists

National Children's Alliance®
The Force Behind Children's Advocacy Centers

Dakota Children's ADVOCACY CENTER

MUSC
Medical University of South Carolina

Red River CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER

Here's how to make sure kids get the most out of your expert services.

Select a safe and confidential space.

If you're not calling from your dedicated office, make sure you select a place you won't be interrupted and relatively quiet. This seems obvious, but we often forget about dogs barking, noisy lawn mowers, coworkers talking, and other common background noises.

Locking the room you are in can help prevent people coming in and out while you are on a call. It is also helpful to use a headset to block out background noise for yourself and assist with maintaining confidentiality for your clients. Using a fan or white noise machine can also help increase privacy.

When working within your own home, it can help to rearrange the space to help differentiate the space used within the home for everyday activities verses the space being used therapeutically.

Check the lighting and camera angle.

Make sure there is enough light for your face to be seen clearly during the call. It is important that the child feels connected and engaged with you. Where you look impacts that, so position your camera on your screen in a way that the child knows you are looking at them.

Keep safety in mind.

Even though telehealth is a safe and effective way to provide mental health services, remember that you cannot be there physically in the room with them. At the beginning of each session, make sure you verify the address where the child is for the session, location in the home, which adults are in the home during the session, and have up to date emergency contacts available.

Limit distractions.

Just as in your in-person sessions, it is important to create a therapeutic environment and stays focused yourself.

- Ensure you have a neutral background to limit distractions.

- Center yourself in the middle of the video frame with your head nearly touching the top of the frame. If possible, set your camera to include your upper body. This allows your client to see your gestures.

- Close email and turn off notifications so that you can stay focused and not distracted by email, texts or calls.

Check your connection!

We strongly recommend using wired connection (LAN cable) instead of Wi-Fi for a more stable connection during a call. If this is not an option, try moving your device closer to the Wi-Fi hotspot or router. While most platforms work on bandwidths as low as 200kbps, you may consider upgrading for a better video experience.

Do a Sound Check. Make sure your audio is working well. We recommend keeping a pair of headphones handy (and asking your client to do the same) to avoid echo problems and this also helps with maintaining confidentiality.

Do a test call.

Do a test call before your first session with the family, or if the setting changes, to make sure everything works on your end and also to see what the family will experience on their end. Familiarize yourself with how to use your platform's dashboard. Know where the video and audio settings are located. Learn how to screenshare and file-send if you need these features. Many times families have difficulty connecting and following all the steps connecting via telehealth for the first time and so when starting telehealth services with a family it is important to also set up a test call with them to make sure everything works.

Be ready to troubleshoot.

Have your IT support information easily accessible if you need help at any point during your session.