



# TIPS AND TRICKS FOR SUCCESSFUL TELETHERAPY TREATMENT IN TF-CBT



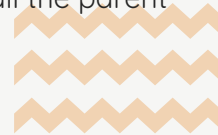




-Nichole Appleby, LCSW





# RULES OF ENGAGEMENT



- Determine the **client's ability** to have virtual sessions. Find out about internet and device capability with the client or caregiver, including use of headphones during session. Problem solve and **plan** for interference in wifi or internet service and how this will be handled during session.
  - Establish with client or caregivers **where meetings will take place in their home**. Find out what room will be the best for privacy and minimal distractions.
  - Schedule virtual appointments for times **when nothing else will be going on** at that time, for example, sessions aren't happening at dinner time, etc...
  - **Plan for interruptions** on your side and discuss with clients what you will do, for example I will turn off my camera if we are interrupted and if you will wait to say anything until you see me.
  - Plan for and **problem solve interruptions in the client's home**, with phones or other family members
  - **Plan for when kids mute themselves** or go off screen, for example being able to call the parent for help
  - Pre-plan for **parent staying close by** or in the house
  - Plan for families that have **limited space or privacy**, discuss options for best time or best way to meet for privacy
  - Let the client and/or family know **what to expect from therapist**, for example, I may write things down so that I can remember, for children and families-discuss how the parent will be communicated with and how the parent will be involved in sessions and treatment
  - Explain **how sessions will be structured**, for example, first we will discuss our plan or agenda for the session or first I'll meet with your mom and then you
  - On the first session show or explain to the client or family **how to use the virtual platform** you are using and its different features, for example, sometimes we will use the whiteboard or we can use the chat if someone comes in the room, etc.
  - Establish **how you will handle no shows or being late**. For example, I will call you 5 minutes into our session to make sure you received the link, etc.
  - Make sure you **have any emergency services contact information** for the client's community available during sessions.
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# CREATING A THERAPUETIC SPACE VIA TELETHERAPY

Some elements we encourage to create a safe, calm and fun space at home for teletherapy sessions:

- **A space that is as private as possible**- this may go without saying, and trust us, we have had to say it out loud to our clients lots of times. "This is a private and confidential time and we want you to feel this the best you can at home."
- **Bring on the headphones!** Sometimes clients feel like they have to turn down the volume on the device and play a game of "Can you hear me?" If at all possible, encourage headphones.
- **Bring on the cozy blanket or pillow or stuffed animal(s).** Is there something in the home that creates a sense of warmth and comfort that can consistently be in sessions?
- **We love a good snack and beverage.** Does this client love hot tea? Or some lemonade? Is it a child who just got home from school and needs a snack. We often try to keep this in mind in office and for teletherapy and with several clients, I invite them to afternoon tea while we talk. This seems to reduce the stress and make the whole interaction more comfortable.
- **Take your shoes off! Stay a while.** Some clients seem to address teletherapy sessions like a virtual session with a doctor and sit at a desks looking very uncomfortable, so we explore a more comfortable place and encourage them to literally take their shoes off if that helps with the vibe.
- **For young children- is there a toy they would like to bring** to show in session?
- **Would it be helpful to bring smells into the session?** How about a diffuser or a candle or some smell good lotion? Bonus that these are grounding.
- **Lighting,** we have some teenagers we work with who live in the dark, we discuss at minimum a lamp, or if they feel like they are being spotlighted by the overhead light, is there a way to make this small detail more comfortable?
- **Lastly, if possible can you as the therapist mimic some of the things that help your client?** If your client has a candle burning, can you do the same? If they are having a snack, could you join them in this? These can help with connection and coherence.

We know that we can never replicate our office into someone's home, but we can make a plan to create something more comfortable and calming while we do this hard work with our clients. We are trying to achieve a private, emotionally safe and physically safe space. As we are aware that rates of domestic violence and physical abuse are increasing, safety should always be the first priority. If this is a concern, then it may be helpful to ask the client to scan the room with the device they are using to insure privacy and safety during session.



# TELETHERAPY WITH YOUNG CHILDREN



## Caregivers are key!

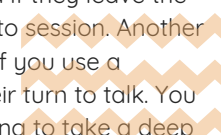
One way to keep kids engaged in teletherapy is have their parent be present in the room and in the session to help the child stay engaged. Therapists can pre-plan with parents or caregivers to decide how they will be involved in session. The parent can write out the agenda for session or make a picture agenda and let the kid check off each item. A simple agenda might look like “read a book, learn a new skill, practice with mommy.” After each item is complete the child can check the item off the agenda. The parent is also using their presence in session to keep the child focused (even if they are sitting on the other side of the room reading to just help with re-direction). If a session involves toys the parent can gather the toys and play with the child and toys as the therapist interacts with the child.

## Mailing and Emailing

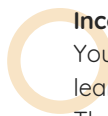
You can include a brief note to the child and even a picture of yourself, in the mailing. If a parent has a way to print at home, you can email materials for your teletherapy sessions for them to print out and use in session.

## Stuffy Friend

Another way to feel connected is to have the child “invite a friend” to session. This may be a favorite toy or stuffed animal that they bring to session. You can ask their friend questions or have them participate in other ways, such as having the toy sing a song or share a skill. The therapist can also have “a friend” in session and have a stuffed animal that talks to the child or learns the skill being taught with the child. The stuffed animal can also “search” for the child if they leave the camera or computer. Once the child returns be sure to have your toy praise the child for coming back to session. Another way to connect with the child is to “hand” them toys or other things through the camera. For example, if you use a microphone in session you can pretend to hand them the microphone through the screen when it is their turn to talk. You can also hand toys or even skills through the camera to encourage engagement. For example, “I’m going to take a deep breath and now I’m going to hand it to you so you can take a deep breath” or “I’m making tea and I’ll pour you some through the computer.”



## Incorporate Play



Young children learn by playing. Making sessions fun that incorporate play will help keep kids engaged and help with learning. Therapists can use toys and pretend play to teach different concepts or talk about feelings and thoughts. Therapists can use songs to re-engage kids who leave the camera, for example, singing, “Where is Ashley, Where is Ashley?” To the tune of “Where is Thumbkin” can help get kids back to the camera. Therapists can have the child retrieve things from other rooms that can be used in session. Incorporating books into session or videos can be another way to keep kids engaged. The therapist, child and parent can get their wiggles out before session or take stretch breaks to help keep attention.

## All the Praise!

Finally, don’t forget to use specific praise and active ignoring to gain cooperation. Children cannot resist being praised and want to please adults. Therapist should praise the child for paying attention, for listening and participating in therapy. Therapists should ignore attention seeking behavior and praise the behavior they want when the child displays that behavior. For example, ignoring when the child yells and praising them when they use a calm voice, such as “I love it when you speak softly while we play” or “I love when you use your calm voice to tell me things.” Using these techniques also models to parents how to use these skills strategically, as well.



# FUN RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

1- **Virtual UNO** can be a very fun way to stay active and engaged- UnoFreak.com allows you to create a private room where you can play and then utilize the skip, reverse and draw 2 and 4 cards to incorporate anything from feelings words and scenarios to psychoeducation facts.



2- **Liana Lowenstein** has a lot of creative interventions and also has a webinar about making telehealth fun for children. One of my favorite engagement activities in the office or over telehealth is her Colored Candy Go Around. Small colored candies such as Skittles or M&Ms are used for this activity. Each color candy has questions assigned to them. For telehealth you can ask the caregiver to purchase their candy the week before your session. You can find more detailed directions and information about her interventions at [www.lianalowenstein.com](http://www.lianalowenstein.com)

4- Using a **Deck of playing cards** can be fun. If your client has playing cards at home you can play War and when someone wins or loses they have to answer a question or practice a relaxation skill. You can pair this with almost any topic you are covering in treatment.

5- **Paper, Rock, Scissors** is also a fun way to take turns answering questions.

6- **Jeopardy Labs** at [www.jeopardylabs.com](http://www.jeopardylabs.com) You can create your own jeopardy game or use of their games on a variety of subjects.

7- **The Bingo Baker** [www.bingobaker.com](http://www.bingobaker.com) This website has thousands of bingo cards you can use for a variety of topics. You can use their bingo card generator to make your own custom bingo card with words, images or colors!

8- [www.wheeldecide.com](http://www.wheeldecide.com) **Wheel Decide** has many wheels you can use to spin and play and you can also create your own using their wheel builder.

9- **CNUSD Virtual Calming Room-**

<https://sites.google.com/cnugd.k12.ca.us/cnugdvirtualcalmingroom/>

# FUN RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES, CONTINUED...

10- **Create jars** for each client that you keep in your office- each client I bring the jar tot he camera and we try to place what was learned or points of gratitude in the jar. We decorate each jar virtually (I have the crafts in my office and have the kid tell me what to do) and then we can send the things that were learned at the end of treatment.

11- **Kahoot**- Kahoot.com-make quizzes and games

13- Make your own game! Something fun like **2 truths and a lie** to practice skills and learn more about the client and their family.

14- **Quizlet**- <https://quizlet.com/> is a wonderful resource to make fun quizzes and more interactive conjoint sessions!

15- **MUSC** has created a great resource broken down by component  
<https://telehealthfortrauma.com/resources/>

16- **Sesame Street** always has great resources. Great for little ones, interactive videos and printables at [www.sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/emotions](http://www.sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/emotions)

17- Keeping an **Expandable Breathing Ball** at your desk to use as a visual to practice belly breathing is a fun way to incorporate relaxation and breathing.

