

Informed Consent for TeleMental Health

This Informed Consent for TeleMental Health services contains important information focusing on doing psychotherapy over the Internet through video conferencing. Please read this carefully, and let me know if you have any questions. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

Benefits and Risks of TeleMental Health Video Conferencing

This Informed Consent form refers specifically to providing counseling and psychotherapy services remotely using video conferencing. One of the benefits of TeleMental Health video conferencing is that the client and clinician can engage in services without being in the same physical location. This can be helpful in ensuring continuity of care if the client or clinician moves to a different location, takes an extended vacation, or is otherwise unable to continue to meet in person. It is also more convenient and takes less time. TeleMental Health video conferencing, however, requires technical competence on both our parts to be helpful. Although there are benefits of telepsychology, there are some differences between in-person psychotherapy and video conferencing, as well as some risks. For example:

- Risks to confidentiality. Because TeleMental Health video conferencing sessions take place outside of the therapist's private office, there is potential for other people to overhear sessions if you are not in a private place during the session. On my end I will take reasonable steps to ensure your privacy. But it is important for you to make sure you find a private place for our session where you will not be interrupted. It is also important for you to protect the privacy of our session on your cell phone or other device. You should participate in therapy only while in a room or area where other people are not present and cannot overhear the conversation.
- Issues related to technology. There are many ways that technology issues might impact the video conferencing session. For example, technology may stop working during a session, other people might be able to get access to our private conversation, or stored data could be accessed by unauthorized people or companies.
- Crisis management and intervention. Usually, I will not engage in TeleMental Health video conferencing with clients who are currently in a crisis situation requiring high levels of support and intervention. Before engaging in TeleMental Health video conferencing, we will develop an emergency response plan to address potential crisis situations that may arise during the course of therapy.
- Efficacy. Most research shows that TeleMental Health video conferencing is about as effective as in-person psychotherapy. However, some therapists believe that something is lost by not being in the same room. For example, there is debate about a therapist's ability to fully understand non-verbal information when working remotely.

Video Conferencing System

I currently use the Doxy.Me video conferencing platform. This video conferencing platform is encrypted to the federal standard, HIPAA compatible, and has signed a HIPAA Business Associate Agreement (BAA). The BAA means that Doxy.Me is willing to attest to HIPAA compliance and assumes responsibility for keeping our video conferencing interaction secure and confidential.

If we choose to do video conferencing, I will give you detailed directions regarding how to log-in securely. I also ask that you sign on to the platform at least five minutes prior to your session time to ensure we get started promptly. Additionally, you are responsible for initiating the connection with me at the time of your appointment. I strongly suggest that you only communicate through a computer or device that you know is safe (e.g., has a firewall, anti-virus software installed, is password protected, not accessing the internet through a public wireless network, etc.).

You may have to have certain computer or cell phone systems to use the Doxy.me video conferencing service. For example, Doxy.me runs well on both Firefox and Google Chrome web browsers, but it does *not* work with the Internet Explorer browser. Also, since I am not using the high definition Doxy.me system, you may see mildly pixelated or blurred video images on your computer. Crisper video images seem to be displayed on mobile phones than a Windows-based computer.

Please understand that you are solely responsible for any cost to you to obtain any necessary equipment, accessories, or software to take part in TeleMental Health video conferencing.

Digital Communications With Therapist

For communication between sessions, I only use email communication and text messaging (with your permission) and only for administrative purposes unless we have made another agreement. This means that email exchanges and text messages with my office should be limited to administrative matters. This includes things like setting and changing appointments, billing matters, and other related issues. You should be aware that I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of any information communicated by email or text. Therefore, I will not discuss any clinical information by email or text and prefer that you do not either. Also, I do not regularly check my email or texts, nor do I respond immediately, so these methods *should not* be used if there is an emergency.

Urgent Issues

Treatment is most effective when clinical discussions occur at your regularly scheduled sessions. But if an urgent issue or a crisis situation arises, please call me and if I'm not available leave a voicemail message (206-361-7544). I will try to return your call as soon as I can, or within 24 hours (except on weekends and holidays). If you are unable to reach me and feel that you cannot wait for me to return your call, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call. *You may also consider calling the 24-hour King County Crisis Line at 206-461-3222, if it is a crisis situation or a life threatening emergency.* If I will be unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact in my absence if necessary.

Confidentiality

I have a legal and ethical responsibility to make my best efforts to protect all communications that are a part of our telepsychology. However, the nature of electronic communications technologies is such that I cannot guarantee that our communications will be kept confidential or that other people may not gain access to our communications. I will try to use updated encryption methods, firewalls, and back-up systems to help keep your information private, but there is a risk that our electronic communications may be compromised, unsecured, or accessed by others. You should also take reasonable steps to ensure the security of our communications. For example, when videoconferencing I will only use a secure, HIPPA-compliant platform (Doxy.me) for our TeleMental Health counseling sessions.

The extent of confidentiality and the exceptions to confidentiality that I outlined in my Psychotherapist-Patient Services Agreement Form still apply in TeleMental Health video conferencing. Please let me know if you have any questions about exceptions to confidentiality.

Appropriateness of TeleMental Health Video Conferencing

At present, I will only offer TeleMental Health services as a supplement to our regular, in-person counseling meetings. With this technology we can now maintain appointments if you are ill, hospitalized or if you cannot get to the office because of child care coverage, transportation problems, weather conditions, etc.

Please note that I am only allowed to provide TeleMental Health video conferencing services if we are *both* located in a state in which I am licensed as a psychologist. At this time, I am currently licensed only in the State of Washington. I also have an “Inactive” license in Oregon which I may reactivate in the near future. By law, Medicare patients must be in a medical facility (hospital, clinic or physician’s office) at the time of service.

Technology Problems

If the session is interrupted for any reason, such as the technological connection fails, please end and then restart the session. If we are unable to reconnect within a few minutes, then please call me on my office phone (206-361-7544).

Fees

If there is a technological failure and we are unable to resume the videoconference connection, you (or your insurance carrier) will only be charged a prorated amount based on the actual video conferencing session time. If we need to continue the session by phone, then please understand that teleconferencing is *not* usually covered by your insurance providers. Because of this restriction, you will be solely responsible for the fee (pro-rated at \$50 per 15 minutes) for the balance of the counseling session conducted by phone. ***Please contact your insurance company prior to our engaging in TeleMental Health sessions in order to determine whether these sessions will be covered.***

Records

The TeleMental Health sessions shall not be recorded in any way unless agreed to in writing by mutual consent. I will maintain a record of our session in the same way I maintain records of in-person sessions in accordance with my policies.

Informed Consent

This agreement is intended as a supplement to the general informed consent that we agreed to at the outset of our clinical work together and does not amend any of the terms of that agreement.

Your signature below indicates agreement with its terms and conditions.

(Client Signature)

(Date)

(Therapist Signature)

(Date)