

ONEcare Virtual Engagement Tip Sheet: Getting Your Environment Ready for Teletherapy

An important part of your teletherapy session is your environment. Though teletherapy may eliminate the need for you and/or your client to come into the office, you must still have a designated, secure space for your sessions. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

Practice in front of the camera.

Talking to a web-camera feels awkward at first and you will want to practice. With just a little practice, you will start to feel comfortable. If you're comfortable, your clients will feel comfortable. Just like in office therapy, the more you do it, the more comfortable and productive your therapy sessions will be. Practice video chatting with a friend, colleague, or family member before you jump into a therapy session.

Create the right environment whether in your clinic office or home office.

Even if you're set up to video-chat at home, make sure you're projecting professionalism. That means:

Do's

- Make sure your audio and video work prior to session start time
- Have a backup plan if video disconnects such as a proactive plan for telephonic engagement.
- Your background in the camera should be clean, uncluttered and free of visual distractions.
- Select a space that is private and free of distractions. Close doors and windows so no one else can hear your conversation.
- Protect and remove all PHI from view.
- Adequate lighting; natural lighting is best. Position your camera so the light is shining on your face, not the back of your head.
- Do your best to remove distracting noise such as barking dogs, ringing phones, blaring televisions, and other background conversations. Place your phone ringer on silent.
- Place an "In Session" sign on your door to prevent unwanted intrusions.
- Even though you may not be leaving your home, dressing professionally is important.

Don'ts

- Forget to be kind to yourself if it feels like conducting therapy by phone does not feel the same as in-person. Change can be challenging.
- Speak too quickly or for too long, if possible – sometimes video/audio lags in a bi-directional situation.

Coach your patients.

Even if your environment is ready for teletherapy, it will not be very effective if your client's environment is not ready. Much like in office sessions, help clients get comfortable and prepare for session. Provide some coaching; ensuring your client has the best possible teletherapy experience possible. That includes everything from equipment and connectivity to finding a quiet space, avoiding distractions. Use the do's and don'ts above to coach your client. Additional DO's

- Check-in regularly to assess if their needs are being met and if not, then work with them to address barriers.
- Assess client's readiness and willingness to engage in tele-mental health. Learn more in the Blaze tip sheet, *Five-step process to helping set up mobile device/laptop/tablet*.
- It's important to allay any fears clients' may have about security so knowing the basics about the technology you are using, and having a basic understanding of the security features is important.
- Share your organization's policy and obtain informed consent for virtual health participation.