



Telehealth Guidelines for Staff

Purpose: Center For Family Services is committed to providing services to the individuals and families in our communities. As a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic, teleservices are service provided using remote technology. These guidelines are designed to provide guidance when continuing to provide high quality services.

Procedures:

Staff Guidelines for Preparing Clients for Telehealth Services during COVID-19

- *Explore options with clients.* It will be important to discuss options whenever possible to help empower clients in the decision making process.
- *Obtain informed consent.* Inform clients about risks vs. benefits, document the options explored, and that the client provided consent to receive services in this manner.
- *Revise service plans as needed.* Please be sure to assess your clients' current situation, safety concerns, coping strategies, trauma symptoms, etc. While this is always important in our work, it is especially important now due to this public health crisis. Many people may be experiencing increased triggers and/or have limited access to healthy coping strategies.
- *Ensure safety and confidentiality.* At the outset of each telehealth session, it is important that staff confirm the identity of the client, that the client is in a private area where their confidentiality is protected, and that it is safe for them to receive services at that time. It will also be important to ask the client for the physical address where they are currently located at the beginning of each session.
- *Develop a crisis plan.* Staff and clients should develop an emergency plan in the event a crisis occurs during a session. This plan could include the use of code words that the client can use to indicate that it is unsafe and/or that they want you to call 911. The plan could also outline steps that will be taken in the event of a mental health crisis, such as having thoughts of self-harm or suicide.
- *Develop a back-up communication plan.* Staff and clients should develop a back-up plan to communicate in the event that there is a disruption in service.
- *Offer additional referrals.* Some options include our Access Department, First Call for Help, as well as state and national hotlines.

Staff Guidelines for Preparing Themselves for Telehealth Services

Prior to seeing the first patient in this program, each staff should participate in a mock appointment with another staff or supervisor at the Center For Family Services to help ensure competency, trial technology and check the environment. Teleservices provided must be safe, confidential, and efficient and meet or exceed the quality of care provided at an in-person setting. Remote services should replicate in-person services as closely as possible.

These same guidelines are applicable to any staff, team or stakeholders meetings.

Technology

- Staff should ensure cell phone/laptop is fully charged and/or plugged in to a power source.
- Troubleshoot connection issues prior to the start of a session.
- Factors such as poor camera quality, positioning of the camera, and the size of the screen may limit the quality of the interactions between staff and clients.

Environment

- Staff planning to use this method of communicating are encourage practice prior to using this with clients. Please ensure you consider:
 - *Confidentiality* - Teleservices, both combined audio/visual and audio only, are to be conducted in a private location behind a closed door. While in session it is important to have the focus and attention on those that are receiving services. Utilize a no knock protocol if needed.
 - *Lighting* – the light source should be in front of you so you can be seen clearly (rather than above or behind you).
 - *Camera positioning* – be sure to set-up the computer/phone in an appropriate place like an office/table (not on a bed or floor), and that the background images are appropriate and trauma informed.
 - *Eye contact* - simulating eye contact while video conferencing takes practice. While we may want to look into the eyes of the image on the screen, doing so may appear to the other person that we are not looking at them.
 - *External Factors* – Avoid interruptions and work to reduce external noises that may be disruptive and challenging for the individual receiving services.

Professionalism

- Keep in mind that even though you will be working from home, you will still need to follow the agency's customer service and professionalism guidelines.
 - *Dress Code* – Ensure appropriate dress as if you were in an office setting. Be mindful of coloring with the background and camera angles.

- *Location* – Set up your work staff to have minimal distractions. Televisions and radios should be off and limit background noise. These can also sound differently through the speakers and cause disruption to the client.
- *Posture* – Staff should conduct services while sitting up. Lounging and laying down are not appropriate. Services should mimic office setting.
 - *Children* – Special considerations may be needed for young children. For example, if you would normally sit on the floor for play therapy, etc., discuss this exception with your supervisor.
- *Distractions* – Perhaps more so than in traditional service settings, staff need to be attentive to the clients. It is not permitted to be on the phone, looking through other screens/windows, etc. Maintaining appropriate eye contact is challenging, but conducting other business when interacting with a client is very rude and distracting. The mute feature does not provide the flexibility to conduct outside discussions or activities.
- Be aware of guidelines on self-disclosure.
 - *Unintentional disclosures* – Check your environment and camera view for items that may reveal more about yourself than normally would in the office. This could be family pictures, alma matter token, town materials, etc.
 - *Intentional Disclosures* – Should be completed in accordance with the code of ethics and only if it is to the benefit of the client and completed with supervisory guidance.