

Telehealth Therapy for Your Child During the COVID Crisis: Tips for Parents and Caregivers

For families and mental health clinicians in Vermont, the COVID-19 pandemic and statewide physical distancing orders have made telehealth therapy the new normal – practically overnight. Here’s what you need to do know to make this as successful as possible for your child.



WHAT *HASN'T* CHANGED?

- ✓ Your child’s therapist is still the same person, with the same expertise, training, and relationship with your child. Your child’s therapist knows that this is a stressful time for you and your family, cares about your family and wants to help!
- ✓ As much as they can, your therapist will try to use familiar activities with your child. Your therapist might ask you for help in making sure your child has what they need, such as art and craft supplies.
- ✓ Even though your child’s therapist may be working from home, your therapist still has confidential access to your child’s clinical record, and will still document each session’s activities and progress. Releases that were in place before the crisis still exist, and your therapist can still work with you and your child’s team via phone or telehealth.
- ✓ If your child is not currently in therapy but you are concerned and want to make an appointment, you will be offered an intake and assessment at our agency just like it

would have happened in person – but via telehealth (ideal) or telephone. We'll ask the same questions, work together to figure out how to meet your child's needs. During this time, you may give your consent to treatment verbally rather than by signature. We will document any consents and follow up with signatures at a later date.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

For your child's therapy to be successful via telehealth, creating a safe space is key.

DO:

- ✓ Help your child by finding a quiet, private space where they can trust that the conversation with their therapist can be confidential.
- ✓ If it helps your child to engage and stay focused, try to have your child dressed and ready for the session and sitting up, just like they would be if they were meeting their therapist in the office.
- ✓ Try to make sure other kids in the house are occupied with another activity to help your child engage, focus, and maintain confidentiality.
- ✓ Remind your child that telehealth can be a chance for your child to show their therapist more of their world: their favorite pet, their coziest spot, the places they play.
- ✓ Communicate with the therapist in advance about whether there are items that you could provide that would help the session work better, such as art supplies or playdough.
- ✓ Communicate with the therapist about your role in the session. Will there be a parent/caregiver check-in at the beginning or end? Is there a need for a parent-child session or a session alone with parents/caregivers? Be present or listen in only as agreed upon with the therapist.
- ✓ Work together with your child's therapist if the length or frequency of sessions isn't working out. There may be some solutions – such as shortening a session – that can help you stay connected.



THINGS TO AVOID:

- ✓ Try to avoid possible distractions for your child, such as phone usage, video games, family meals, or other distractions that might interrupt your child's ability to engage.
- ✓ Avoid high activity areas in your home such as a kitchen where family people are coming in and out, a den with a game or movie playing, or an outside space with a lot of street activity.

REMEMBER:

- ✓ Your child's therapist is also juggling their home/work life. Their goal is to be professional and confidential and they may need some flexibility and understanding from you as you work together to meet your child's needs.
- ✓ Telehealth can work better for some youth and families than in-person therapy. Embrace the convenience and the opportunity to stay connected!