

Guidelines for Conducting Play Therapy Via TeleMental Health

Before You Start:

1. Disadvantages :
 - a. It is difficult to do a thorough diagnosis of a client without being in the room with the client
 - b. It is difficult to help a client regulate through the distance of computer. Phone are particularly challenging to use to help a client regulate, video sessions have the advantage of allowing the therapist to observe some of the client's nonverbal and to use mirroring to help client regulate. (Dion, Lisa)
 - c. Therapist will be missing out on body/nonverbal cues (i.e. anxious client is taping their feet or fidgeting below the computer screen). Possible solutions: Ask the client (adult and/or child) about what is going on in their body or specifically ask about their hands/feet in the moment (Dion, Lisa)
2. Advantages:
 - a. The therapist will get to see the client and their family in their natural environment:
 - b. For some children using technology is more meaningful way to connect (Dion, Lisa)
3. For young child (under 3 years of age or older) telehealth session can be used to guiding parent in playing with their child. Therapist can focus on attachment and attunement through directing play or giving feedback after observing play. (Pride Skills and Triple P Skill implementation would work in this way)
4. Parenting sessions for caregivers can be a good way to deliver telemental health to child clients. A therapist can guide a caregiver to use a parenting skills with the children in the room. (Please note: a disadvantage to this is for children who might see the therapist telling the parent how to respond as their parent being incompetent. Typically this could be an issues for elementary age children). Parents and therapist can learn and role play parenting skills, develop family rules and schedules.

The First Telehealth Session:

1. Meet first with the client's parents to discuss providing telemental health. Find out what materials the family has in their home including toys and art supplies. Recommend which toys and materials the child should have available for each session. Discuss with parent ways to decrease distraction in the home (headphones if there will be sounds in the house that might be distracting for kid or making sure client won't be on ipad playing games).
2. When setting up your computer screen here is a suggestion to appear like you are looking in the client's eyes. You should not stare into your computer camera, you will look like you are looking

over your client. “Instead, take your screen out of full-view. Minimize it so it takes up to 2/3rds of the screen. Center it directly under your camera. Look at the client in their eyes. It will LOOK like you are looking them in the eyes. Teach them to do the same”. (Laundrum)

3. “For teens, discuss respecting the time as therapy time. Encourage not logging into social media or responding to notifications. Have a discussion on respect, and inform them that you value their time as well, and will also not be logging into social media or responding to notifications.” (Laundrum)
4. When you meet with someone, it is important to ascertain where they are at the start of every session. If there is a problem and you need to call 911, you'll need to tell emergency responders where the client is. At the start of the first telehealth session, confirm you have the right address for them. In subsequent sessions, you can just refer to the location (ie. Are you home) without confirming the exact location. For children, confirm with the parent that they will respond to text or phone calls from you during the session (if the parent is not joining the session).
5. If a client is considered about being overheard by family members (this is particularly common for teens), you can recommend they download a white-noise app on another device to put near the door. (Laundrum)

Sessions:

1. Check in with parents: make sure they are accessible if child needs support and discuss if they will be joining for the session.
2. Start with a ritual: For example feeling recognition, body awareness and movement (see below of ideas) or have parent and child identify 2 things that have gone well this week.
3. With the child, discuss the changes of interaction now that using technology “Since the computer doesn't have legs or a neck to move you may have to bring me with you if you move to another part of the room and help me face you.” (Wolfe & Danhoff). Discuss what to do if issues with services (find parent to help, you or the client might need to repeat if screen freezes)
4. Ask child to show you around their setting and introduce you to their toys. This will give you a sense of the space and items available for sessions.
5. “Teens can be prone to “posing” or looking at themselves in their reflection. Do not be afraid to draw attention to this behavior and attempt to teach them to not look at themselves. Pro tip: it can be hard for you to resist looking at yourself, so use a sticky not to block your minimized face (for anyone new to teletherapy it can be subconsciously distracting)” (Laundrum)

Telehealth Activities:

1. **Puppet Show** (doesn't need to be with actual puppets; any dolls or stuffed animals will do); client and therapist interact through puppets
2. **Screen Sharing**: share your screen with the client to show videos or read books that are online or share screen and create something together.
 - a. CBT for anxiety: GoZen.com
 - b. Zoom has a whiteboard sharescreen that allows host and user to take turns creating together.
3. **Reading a Therapeutic Book**: Therapist can read a book from their home or use the share screen option to read a book online. (<https://www.hoopladigital.com/>)
4. **Mindfulness activities**: 54321 Game-Direct the client to focus on gradually “*five things I see in my environment, 4 things I feel, 3 things I hear, 2 things I smell and 1 good thing about me*”. This activity helps the client recognize that feelings and thoughts pass and even something that felt so important to talk about or think about before the game generally passes completely or loses importance.
5. **Movement**: start session with 20 jumping jacks while counting at a pace this will allow the client to get movement in, release excited or anxious energy at seeing therapist in a different way.
6. **Self Regulation Games**: “red light, green light, yellow light, and purple light. Green means go, red means stop, yellow means slow motion, and purple means do a silly dance.” (Wolfe & Danhoff)
7. **The Freeze Game**: Child and/or therapist dance to a song and then freezes once music stops (Wolfe & Danhoff). This tool can be helpful for the more impulsive kids to allow them to have more body awareness.
8. **Create a Calm Down Corner**: “use pillows, blankets, stuffed animals and anything else that helps them feel safe” (Wolfe & Danhoff)
9. **Animal Emotions**: “choose an animal (or stuffed animal that they have) and act out different emotions with the animal. Or choose a stuffed animal to represent each person in their family and explore how each animal is feeling.” (Wolfe & Danhoff)
10. **Emotions Charades**: Instruct client or family to write different feelings on small pieces of paper and take turns acting out the feelings to have family members or therapist guess that feeling. Take turns doing this.
11. **Mirroring Activity**: (Can be done between family members or with client and therapist). “Instruct family member to choose a leader and a follower. The leader move slowly and the follower tries to mirror the leader's movements” (Wolfe & Danhoff)
12. **Show and Tell**: If the child's computer isn't directly plugged into the modem, have the child give you a tour of their room explaining what the different items are and their importance. Have the child show off an essential comfort/self-soothing item (like a teddy bear or blanket) and explain

why it is comforting. Have them take you to various rooms in the house that are of importance (Landrum, Ariel)

13. **Online Profile:** “Have specific sessions designed for the youth to screen share their online life. Often when youth know this will occur during a session or a website at a time at the end of each session, they are not tempted to go online during therapy. Have them screen share and show you their social media pages (talk about cyberbullying, reporting harassment, blocking people, how it feels to get a "like," who their close friends are, what their favorite memes are, who or what they follow, etc.). Gamer clients can give a tutorial of the game they play (ask about the friends they have made on gaming, what skills they have or how they contribute to the gaming party, ask about problem-solving during the game, team building, and inner game communication, etc.). If they have online school or online assignments, have them give you a tutorial of how school works (ask how they turn in assignments, get help from other students or teachers, take notes, create study groups, etc.). Online life sharing builds rapport and provides necessary insight around stress, struggles, and support the youth has”. (Laundrum)
14. **Play Therapy:** Therapist can conduct a play therapy session by watching the child play and reflecting and commenting on the play (like a therapist would do in therapy room). A therapist would need to make sure the child’s camera is positioned in a way the clinician can see all the play and the child can hear comments-you might want to test this with the parent in the initial set up session.
15. **Dyadic session** with parent and child: therapist can observe and guide parent and child play together. Therapist can stop their video from screening so the child would not be distracted by the therapist on the screen. (Kurtz, Steve)

Troubleshooting with Telehealth Play Therapy:

1. **When I begin my telehealth therapy session, my client is eating a snack or in the middle of something else-I feel like I am just a friend calling in not a therapist trying to do therapy?** It is important to help the parent understand that they need to recreate the therapy ‘space’ in their home. This is new to the parents too! Schedule a time to have a collateral session with the parent. Discuss with the parent what time is good to have a weekly session (not during meal time or school time) get the parent’s input into what would work for their family. Discuss what room in the house can be used and troubleshoot with the parent barriers to different rooms (too many toys might be distracting-a nonplay area with some toys and art material might be a better option). Plan a therapy box with items that parent will take out **ahead** of the session (so the child will not be running around the house during the session looking for markers).
2. **What should I do with my clients on telehealth?** This might be a new way of doing treatment but you are still the same trained and gifted therapist you always were! A lot of techniques we

use in the play therapy room, can be adapted to telehealth treatment (instructing client to draw a picture, feeling recognition, modeling and problem solving, imaginary play, guided relaxation). It can be awkward at first and you need to consider what you might be missing by not being in person; however, you do not need to throw all your favorite therapy techniques to the side! There are some techniques that are particularly helpful to online use.

- 3. While in the session, my anxious/avoidant client hung up on me! What should I do?** I would schedule a collateral with the parent to discuss this treatment barrier. The one outcome could be to support the parent in supporting their child with the child's treatment goals. This would mean switching treatment to more collateral or family sessions. You might also want to consider positive reinforcement to encourage the client to engage. Allowing them to pick a therapy activity or a behavior chart and order a prize from Amazon.
- 4. While in session my client begins to play online games?** Time to schedule a collateral with the client's parent! There are options for the parents to lock the screen so the client cannot end the call or go onto other sites (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDHI44swCT8>- this one is for apple). If you opt to lock the clients screen, I would let the client know so it doesn't become a power issues "Now we are entering the 'therapy space' and I'm glad you are joining me now. In order for us to be connected in this new way, your mom helped me get locked on your screen! So we can spend this time together, I am going to lock you on my screen during our therapy session." You might also want to consider having online gaming you can do together if that can be supported by your functional analysis and treatment of the cases. You can divide the session between 'therapist choses activity' (therapeutic intervention time) and 'client choose online game time' (positive reinforcement).
- 5. My child just walked in while I was in session! What can I do?** Working remotely is challenging on so many level and this is certainly one of the big challenges-keeping the therapy space just for therapy. Since we are working from home the boundaries are so fluid and these type of issues can and do happen. While you are in the session, let your client know you need to 'step out' for a moment and pause your video/audio while you address the interruption. When you return to the session, briefly acknowledge what happened and return to session content. Make sure to deduct the time you spent tending to your family's needs from the total therapy time or consider extending the session to make up for that time. Consider what times are best for you to provide therapy session based on your family's schedule and offer those times to your clients. (found below image on FACEBOOK)



6. **How should I set up the therapy space?** Consider what materials you have at home and have them easily accessible and possibly visibly in the screen when conducting your sessions. A dry erase board might be helpful. Consider the area that the client will see (and not see) and place items accordingly. See below images (from Facebook Group *Tele PLAY Therapy Resources and Support*) :

FOSTER CARE

BAIS EZRA

MENTAL HEALTH

LIFETIME CARE

INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING

TRAUMA

CAMP KAYLIE

Mel Zachter • Jay Kestenbaum, Co-Presidents | David Mandel, Chief Executive Officer



Resources:

<https://synergeticplaytherapy.com/lessons-from-the-playroom-episode-32-does-teletherapy-work-in-play-therapy/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEAlF9UqDfo&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.guidancett.com/blog/interventions-for-online-therapy-with-children-and-youth-2020>

<https://www.jerricadanhoff.com/training-for-therapists>

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