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Telepsychology Services: Additional Information and Policies

Conducting sessions via an online telehealth platform instead of in-person is a service that I currently provide, and I intend to do so for the foreseeable future. I can assure you that I will always utilize a secure, HIPAA-compliant platform for these “virtual” sessions, such as Zoom Pro, Doxy.me, or Sessions. If you have any questions about the policy below, please feel free to discuss them with me.

Benefits and Risks of Telepsychology

There are potential benefits to using telehealth platforms that differ from in-person sessions. Participating in one or more sessions via telehealth could allow you to receive services at times or in places that may not otherwise be available, and/or to receive services in a manner that might be more convenient and less prone to delays than in-person meetings. Telehealth may also allow for continuity of care in the event that either I or you cannot travel to my office for a short period, such as we might have with a snowstorm, or an extended period, like we have had during the Covid-19 pandemic. For some people, telehealth may allow them to make improved progress on health goals that may not have been achievable with in-person sessions.

However, there are also some potential risks with teletherapy. Because teletherapy sessions take place outside of my private office, there is a possibility that other people could overhear sessions if you are not in a sufficiently private space when you’re in session with me. In addition, if you use any kind of a public/free Wi-Fi system for your sessions with me, you might risk the sessions being “hacked into” by malicious actors. Also, if you have any kind of digital assistant app on your phone, or on a separate device elsewhere at your location, such as Siri, Google Now, Google Home, Alexa, or something similar, that app or device may be able to hear, and even record, our conversation. Furthermore, there is always a possibility of a technical failure, such as one of our devices running out of power, or local power systems going out, that will make us unable to complete a session.

If in my professional judgment I come to feel that teletherapy is not right for you, or is not allowing us to attain our goals for your therapy, I will talk with you about this issue, and may recommend that we cease teletherapy and begin in-person sessions when the latter becomes possible. Note that this may mean suspending sessions for a while, such as if the Covid-19 pandemic continues for some months longer, and thus we cannot meet face to face in my office.

Confidentiality

I take the protection of all communications that are part of our teletherapy very seriously, and I have a legal and ethical responsibility to do so. Regardless, although I will make my best efforts to protect our communications, I cannot guarantee that our telehealth sessions will be kept confidential or that other people may not gain access to them.

I will conduct all teletherapy sessions either from my private office, or a private area of my home. You must also be sure that you are in a private space of some kind during our sessions, using a secure internet or wi-fi connection. You should also utilize passwords to protect the device you use for telepsychology. In addition, your location needs to be a quiet space that is free from distractions and/or possible interruptions. Furthermore, as I’ve noted above, it’s important that, prior to our sessions, you turn off any digital assistant apps and/or stand-



alone devices like Siri or Alexa which respond to people speaking “to them”. These devices could in theory be hacked into by malicious actors, and our conversations might even be recorded without our knowing.

Just as if we were meeting in-person, all information disclosed within sessions and records pertaining to sessions are confidential and may not be disclosed to anyone without written authorization, except where disclosure is permitted and/or required by law. The extent of confidentiality and the exceptions to confidentiality that I outlined in the “Confidentiality and Its Limits” section of my “Client Information and Policies” document still apply in telepsychology.

Recordings

Making and storing an audio or video recording of a teletherapy session may increase the risk of your privacy being compromised. Some psychotherapists establish a policy against any such recording for that reason. However, sometimes clients decide that the benefits of having a recording for later review outweigh the privacy risks. I leave it up to you. If you are uncertain about it, please feel free to discuss it with me in session.

Equipment Needed

To participate in teletherapy, you will need a computer with video and microphone capability and reliable access to broadband Internet service. Alternatively, you may use a smartphone; but be sure that you have reliable wi-fi for this device. You are solely responsible for any cost to you to obtain and run the necessary equipment, accessories, and/or software you’ll need to take part in teletherapy.

Planning for Technical Difficulties and Emergencies

Inevitably, we will encounter occasional technical difficulties when doing teletherapy. At our first session, we’ll make a plan about what to do if our video or audio cuts out suddenly during a session. During the current pandemic state of emergency, insurance companies will reimburse for phone-only sessions, should we have to resort to that sometimes. However, there is no guarantee that they will continue to reimburse for phone sessions after the pandemic ends. I will do my best to remain current on the information about phone session reimbursement.

At each session, I need to know your physical location in case of an emergency. Consequently, if you are not in the usual location from which you engage in teletherapy sessions, I’ll expect you to inform me of where you are.

I also need to have the name and contact information of at least one emergency contact person for you. I would only get in touch with this person(s) in the event of a true life-threatening emergency, same as with in-person sessions.

Fees

The same fee rates will apply for telepsychology as apply for in-person psychotherapy. During the Covid-19 New York State of Emergency, most insurance companies in New York are now covering teletherapy sessions, including the co-payment portion of the fees. However, there is no guarantee that they will continue to cover teletherapy sessions at all, much less the co-payment portion, after the state of emergency is lifted. Although I will do my best to remain up-to-date on insurance company policies about paying for teletherapy when the pandemic has ended, you should also keep abreast of your insurance carrier’s policy. If at some point your carrier ceases to cover teletherapy, you will become solely responsible for the full allowable fee for your sessions.