

Anxiety and Telehealth Services

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many psychologists have transitioned to offering online therapy in order to assist clients with fostering their mental well-being while adhering to social distancing and flattening the curve. While the benefits of the online sessions during this uncertain time are

essential, utilizing an online platform for therapy does come with unique considerations, especially in the current climate in which many are transitioning quickly to remote services.

There is strong evidence that psychotherapy, particularly cognitive behaviour therapy, can be effectively delivered online to treat a range of mental health difficulties. Furthermore, online therapy can result in client satisfaction with both the therapy and the quality of their relationship with the psychologist that is similar to levels of satisfaction with face-to-face therapy. Understandably, there are still high levels of anxiety surrounding the use of online platforms for therapy. To help curb the anxiety, psychologists have the responsibility to ensure that they are conducting sessions on a secure and confidential platform; that they have a confidential space; stable internet connection; a comfortability with online sessions and transparency in order to make the client as comfortable as possible. Clients can also try and manage their anxiety about online sessions by employing some of the following points:

Confidentiality. Ensure you are in a confidential setting for your sessions.

Wherever possible, ensure that you secure a quiet environment in which you feel safe to share. Consider the aspects of the area that may help you feel comfortable to share. If someone else is home, perhaps you may ask them to provide you with space while they listen to music or watch TV while you close the door and utilize headphones.

Logistics. At times, technology will fail us. At the start of your online process or sessions, devise a plan with your psychologist about what to do if you can't make contact via the preferred platform, or if the connection fails during a session.

Environment. At home you have a shared responsibility of creating a therapeutic space for your session. Think about the impressions you have gathered about your psychologist's office and what works for you to help you feel comfortable in session. Is it a comfortable chair, or infused aromatherapy air? Do you need to have a box of tissues nearby? Considering the things that you need to feel comfortable during a session.

Settle in. At first, an online session might feel new and unfamiliar. Eye contact, expressions, body position, gestures, voice tone, and silence may all be slightly skewed via telehealth. For example, you may look at the person on screen instead of the camera and therefore eye contact is broken; you may use gestures which are hidden from view; or you may be hyper-aware of the clock in the corner of your laptop. These things are okay, and it is all about reminding yourself that these are part of the normal aspects in the online therapy context. As the online sessions become more comfortable you will settle in and adjust to the new context. Speak to your psychologist about what will be most effective for both and how to adjust to these small changes.

Speak up. Should you be uncomfortable with anything or whether there is something that you are unsure of, address this with your psychologist. They want the most effective and comfortable session for you and will be more than willing to walk you through any difficulties that you are facing due to this new means of therapy.

Take time. Just like a face to face session, an online session may be emotionally tiring or draining. Set some time for yourself after the session to reflect and disconnect properly from the session. Think of it as your car ride home, where you had a bit of time before you engaged with life again.

Need help navigating technology?

Adjusting to online sessions are already tough, however, using online platforms can be particularly daunting to those individuals that are not familiar with technology. Questions such as 'where do you start?' and 'what is the right app?' often pop up and stir up some anxiety. It is important to continue with sessions during this trying time and therefore, get better acquainted with technology. The first step is to check if you have been using a platform that can be used to engage in a session. Have been using What's app? Take it a step further and try the video call function. YouTube offers several tutorials on how to get familiar with any of the communication platforms. Secondly, research different apps that can be used for sessions and check with your psychologists which ones they are using (there will be options). Skype, Zoom and WhatsApp video call are some of the popular options. Choose one and research exactly how the app works. Should you still be unsure, ask your partner or a friend if they know more. You can take it a step further and practice a video call with them to see whether you get the just of it. Don't get too nervous about what you don't know, rather focus on what you can do to equip yourself with new knowledge and skills.



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