

TELE-THERAPY SUGGESTIONS AND RESOURCES

The following information is adapted from the [National Association of School Psychologists \(2020\). Comprehensive suicide prevention in a time of distance learning.](#)

While working and learning virtually, there are a number of different ways in which school-employed mental health professionals can connect with students and provide school psychological services. Before initiating any form of telehealth, familiarity with state telehealth laws is important, and consultation with school district legal counsel is advised.

Key to ensuring as equal access to these services as possible is knowledge of a range of communication options, the most basic of which is the telephone. Other telecommunication options that might be employed to connect with students include Apple FaceTime, Facebook Messenger video chat, Duo Mobile, Google Hangouts Meet, Skype, and Zoom. Specific options that are HIPPA compliant include VSee, doxy.me, and specific Zoom accounts.

At a minimum, when using telehealth it is important to obtain informed consent, and when doing so to notify students and their primary caregivers of the privacy risks of virtual service delivery. Always strive to make use of available privacy and encryption tools and ensure the highest degree of confidentiality possible (e.g., avoid the use of public internet connections).

In addition, school-employed mental health professionals should strive to ensure that not only is their physical service delivery space private, but they should also know the physical location of the student and work to ensure that they have privacy as well. Encouraging the use of headphones with a microphone will give more privacy (and will also cut down on background noise). Especially when delivering high stakes services, such as suicide prevention activities, account for the possibility of telecommunication failure and have back-up communication options (e.g., if using Zoom and your internet connection becomes unstable, then have a cell phone and/or land line that could be called). This should include how to contact any primary caregivers that might be in the home.

Finally, whenever making these services available, schools must work to ensure equal access for all students. Specifically, school-employed mental health professionals must ensure that students with disabilities are able to access these services (see the U.S. Department of Education for more information). In addition, service providers must work to identify and account for youth on the opposite side of the “digital divide,” and use appropriate telecommunication options (e.g., telephones). An especially challenging group is homeless youth, and when meeting their needs collaboration with community mental health is essential.

These include activities that promote mental wellness, and proactively provide guidance that mitigates danger associated with suicidal ideation. There are many opportunities as well as challenges of using telecommunications to provide suicide prevention. For further information and strategies specific to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, see [National Association of School Psychologists \(2020\). Comprehensive suicide prevention in a time of distance learning.](#)

In addition, a few tech tips for video conferencing (PCOM):

1. Use a hard-wired (Ethernet) connection, if available. If using Wifi, try to be as close to the router as possible.
2. Close other programs. Close all programs and streaming services on your computer except for the browser you are using for your teletherapy session.
3. Keep your browser current and **Chrome or Firefox** often work best.
4. Disable Adblockers as these can interfere with sessions.

Teletherapy Considerations and Checklist

The following is adapted from a NASP Community post submitted by Chris Pawluk, Registered Psychologist, Rocky View Schools, Carstairs AB.

Consider Your Own Competencies and Self-Care

- Consider your own skill set with technology. What is appropriate for you to use? Phone? Videoconferencing? Virtual reality?
- Go easy on yourself- we are all in a very unusual situation.
- Delivering remote services for the first time is mentally exhausting, plan for sessions to be harder and take longer until you become skilled at using the modality.
- The type and intensity of work that you do in this modality may be different from what you do in person. Be accepting of this.
- Boundaries are different in tele-services, carefully consider your boundaries and practice guidelines.
- Practicing self-care in an ethical requirement, take the time to look after yourself so you are at your best.

Screen your students(s) to determine whether Tele-Psychology services are appropriate for them

- Consider student's cognitive, developmental, and social-emotional status – can the student effectively participate? If not, can the parents support this effectively?
- Consider student's access to and comfort in using technology. Can they log in and effectively use the technology?
- Does the student have physical space for a private distance session?
- Who do you need to obtain informed consent from? Refer to Tele-psychology consent process document.
- Caregiving resources may be stretched, so consider shorter sessions and avoid placing too many demands on parents. Be accepting that there may be interruptions.

Technology

- Are you using a platform that complies with privacy legislation
- Do you and the student have adequate internet connectivity and technology (i.e., computer with webcam, smartphone, tablet) available for videoconferencing?
- Are you using a password-protected, secure internet connection, not public or unsecured WiFi? What about your student?
- Did you discuss with the student how to log in and use the technology?
- Did you check that your anti-virus/anti-malware protection is up-to-date?

Set-up

- Is the location private on both ends? Is it reasonably quiet? You can use headphones/ear buds with a microphone to increase privacy and audio clarity. Your student may also want to do the same.
- Try to use a large enough screen to see each other clearly.
- Make sure the room has proper lighting and check for shadows. For example: A window in front of you might cast a shadow or create low visibility.
- Check your camera angle to ensure your head and shoulders are appropriately placed on the screen.
- Be aware of what you are wearing that is not visible (i.e., pajama pants). Some activities and questions may require that your entire body becomes visible.
- Notice how close or far back you are from the screen; your location on the screen can influence rapport and connection.
- To improve eye contact, position your camera so that it's easy to look at the camera and the student on the screen.

- Take a look at what is behind you in the session, try to reduce clutter and setup your background to be as inviting as possible. Consider removing personal items or distractions in the background.
- Check the picture and audio quality. Can you see and hear each other? Make sure nobody is muted and both cameras are on.

Pre-session/First virtual session

- Verify the student's identity, if you have never met them in person (consider looking up their picture in the studnet information system).
- Get student assent for telepsychology services.
 - Discuss the potential risks/benefits and limits to confidentiality of telepsychology sessions with the student as per the usual consent processes.
 - Clarify communication pathways and boundaries around booking appointments with the student. Provide crisis resources as necessary.
- Ask the student where they will be for your sessions together (address/location) as well as the phone number(s) of a parent/guardian. This information is important to have if someone is at risk. Don't rely on previous information as they could be in a different location.
- Ensure you know the local resources (i.e., emergency room, urgent care clinics, 911, mobile crisis support, state warmline) where the student is currently located. These resources can be provided as needed to the student or parent/guardian.
- Determine whether an adult will be at that location or if the student is alone. Consider whether you want the parent in the session or not.
- Create a back-up plan in case of technical difficulties (i.e., obtain student's and/or parent/guardian's phone number).

Beginning of every virtual session

- Think about what you might want the student to bring to your session and ask the student or parent/guardian to gather the supplies ahead of time (i.e., games, art supplies, paper, markers, playdoh, toys, stuffed animals, etc.)
- Consider starting and ending your session with a predictable ritual to join together in the digital "room." We tend to do this naturally in person but may need to be more mindful about this practice when done virtually.
 - Examples:
 - Ensure students have what they need to start the session (water, tea)
 - Try a relaxation or breathing exercise
 - Start with a check-in question
- Confirm virtual session logistics
- Confirm the students address/location for the session as well as the phone number(s) of a parent/guardian (ask or confirm every time).
- Review importance of privacy at your location and student's location.
- All individuals present for the virtual visit must be within view of the camera, so the provider is aware of who is participating.
- Confirm that nobody will record the session without permission.
- Turn off all apps and notifications on your computer, tablet, or smartphone. Ask student to do the same for all devices.

During the Session

- Conduct the session mostly like you would an in-person session. Be yourself.
- When using gestures, consider what is seen in the screen and how they would appear to the student.
- Consider finding ways to engage students virtually.
 - Consider how you make the session fun
 - Think about how you can modify what they like to do in your office in an online environment
 - Use of body/brain breaks

- Use the screen as a mirror and copy each other (i.e., mirror actions and emotions)
- Use dice for a grounding game (i.e., each number on the die is a different sense for grounding)
- You can use puppets on the screen to engage younger children
- Consider using games
 - Try games that require no or only minimal supplies (i.e., Pictionary, Rock Paper Scissors, Complete a Story, Charades, Pick a Question, Sentence Stems, Hangman, 20 Questions)
 - Some games only need one person to own the game and you can play together virtually (i.e., Scattergories, Memory)
 - If you and your student have a copy of the same board game you can both set it up and just move the pieces at the same time (i.e., Monopoly, Candyland, Uno, Yahtzee, Apples to Apples, Guess Who, Snakes and Ladders, Clue, Phase 10, Operation, Farkle, Go Fish, Battleship)
- Consider using expressive arts (both sites need supplies)
 - Complete an art project together with similar supplies
 - Do an art project with students over the computer or on the videoconference virtual whiteboard.
 - Bring musical instruments to play together. Some may have to be improvised.
 - Create a digital play list or "theme song" together
- Consider practicing skills and coping strategies with your students. Remember that students may revert to unhealthy coping strategies during a time of distress and need practice with healthy coping strategies and distress tolerance skills, even strategies/skills that were previously mastered.
 - Distress tolerance skills
 - Mindfulness
 - Relaxation strategies
 - Develop a coping skills toolkit

After the Session

- Make sure you close the session for everyone, not just you.
- Schedule some time to wrap up the session.
- Complete notes as per your usual process. Remember that recorded sessions are part of the notes, so consider carefully if you want to record the sessions.

Grief and Loss in the time of COVID-19

The following is adapted from [Uniting for Suicide Postvention: Reminders for suicide postvention in the time of coronavirus](#).

If we are unable to connect physically, how can we support others in their time of grief?

- Reach out several times a week
- Leave messages letting the loss survivor know you are thinking about them and are here for them
- Offer your full attention; focus on listening by asking open-ended questions
- Provide an emotional presence; make room to simply sit quietly on the phone together
- Send messages of support via text (see PSCA video for text messaging apps to block numbers)
- Determine what the loss survivor needs help with and assist with tangible, supportive tasks
- Send notes of support, care packages, and resources via US Mail
- Utilize technological options (noted above) to video connect
- Engage in a distraction together
 - Play a game simultaneously (e.g., set an appointment to log on at the same time to play a video game or a web-based game), do a hobby (e.g., knit, do the same workout) or watch a video together.

- Help the loss survivor establish a memorial place and/or a symbol to help honor the person who died
 - Having a designated place in the home (e.g., yard, patio, converted bedroom) can assist with grieving rituals and reflection

Reminders for Grief Conversations over the Phone

- **Pacing:** Increased rate of speech can suggest impatience, inattentiveness, or anxiety – remember to speak slowly
- **Tone:** Use variation in tone and expression of warmth to express empathy via your voice
- **Emotion:** Without visual cues, assessing emotions can be tough; offer reflection, check in, and provide validation
 - Example: “I can hear the (anger, sadness, relief, confusion, frustration) in your voice – is that accurate? That makes sense...many loss survivors feel the same.”
- **Responsive:** Before you provide information and knowledge, ask questions to ensure you understand what the loss survivor needs and/or how they are doing.
 - Even if the loss survivor states they appreciate the call and don’t need anything, let them know that you will be calling back to check-in on them to continue being there.
 - Needs change over the grieving journey – be sure to be there regardless of whether the loss survivor asked or needed something last call.

Awareness: Express the difficulty that comes with being “physically”

RESOURCES

NASP Guidance on Telehealth and Virtual Service Delivery

[When one door closes and another opens: School Psychologists providing telehealth services](#)

[Legal and ethical considerations for remote school psychological services](#)

[Virtual service delivery in response to COVID-19 disruptions](#)

[NASP guidance for the delivery of school psychological telehealth services](#)

Telehealth and Virtual Service Delivery Resources

[Notification of enforcement discretion for telehealth remote communications during COVID-19](#)

[National Center for School Mental Health COVID-19 Resources](#)

[Zero Suicide - Telehealth tips: Managing suicidal clients during COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[COVID-19: Tips for building rapport with youth via telehealth](#)

[A practical guide to video mental health consultation](#)

[Search Institute – Checklist: Building Developmental Relationships during the COVID-19 crisis](#)

Telehealth Trainings – Most of these are FREE

[A practical guide to providing telepsychology with minimal risk](#)

[American Psychological Association: Providing psychological services in the face of uncertainty](#). FREE.

[American Psychological Association: Telehealth continuing education resources/courses](#)

[A telepsychology primer](#)

[Best practices in grief and bereavement tele-therapy](#)

[Pennsylvania School Counselor Association Coronavirus Roundtable: Distance school counseling strategies and tools](#)

[Responding to a pandemic: COVID-19 and integrated primary care](#)

[Telehealth for Mental Health Professionals: 2 day distance therapy training](#). Free with the **Promo Code: TELEFREE**. This webinar includes the training, a quiz, and CEU certificate (as desired). Please note that the training will appear to be at normal price when you register until you reach the final registration page, where you are permitted to enter the "discount" or promo code.

For further COVID-19 information and resources, visit the following sites

[10 Tips for families coping with COVID19](#) (with Spanish and English subtitles)

[American Psychological Association resources special section on Pandemics](#)

[American Psychological Association FREE articles from APA journals](#)

[American School Counselor Association](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[National Association of School Psychologists](#)

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(Spanish forms\)](#)

[United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights](#)

[World Health Organization](#)

For more information on suicide prevention and intervention for schools and on COVID-19, visit NASP's COVID-19 Resource Center at www.nasponline.org/COVID-19.

For more information on grief and loss during this time of COVID-19, visit the Association for Death Education and Counseling at <https://www.adec.org/page/ADECinConversationCoronavirus2019>.