Sample Telemental Health Services

Informed Consent

* Organization/Practice Name
* Student Counselor name with supervisor’s information (site and university)
* Organization/Practice street address
* Website address

# Overview for Clients

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| * You will need access to the certain technological services and tools to engage in telemental health-based services with your counselor |
| * Telemental health has both benefits and risks, which you and your counselor will be monitoring as you proceed with your work |
| * It is possible that receiving services by telemental health will turn out to be inappropriate for you, and that you and your counselor may have to cease work by telemental health |
| * You can stop work by telemental health at any time without prejudice |
| * You will need to participate in creating an appropriate space for your telemental health sessions |
| * You will need to participate in making a plan for managing technology failures, mental health crises, and medical emergencies |
| * Your counselor follows security best practices and legal standards in order to protect your health care information, but you will also need to participate in maintaining your own security and privacy |

# What is Telemental health?

“Telemental health”, “Distance Counseling” , or “Technologically Assisted Counseling” means, in short, provision of mental health services with the counselor and recipient of services being in separate locations, and the services being delivered over electronic media.

Providing therapy or supervision with technologies and devices for electronic communication and information exchange between a licensee in one location and a client or supervisee in another location (Texas Administration Code, RULE §801.58)

Services delivered via telemental health rely on a number of electronic, often Internet-based, technology tools. These tools can include videoconferencing software, email, text messaging, virtual environments, specialized mobile health (“mHealth”) apps, and others.

## Your counselor typically provides telemental health services using the following tools:

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| *[list name of software/service/hardware tool/app you intend to use]* |

* You will need access to Internet service and technological tools needed to use the above-listed tools in order to engage in telemental health work with your counselor.
* If you have any questions or concerns about the above tools, please address them directly to your counselor so you can discuss their risks, benefits, and specific application to your treatment.

# Benefits and Risks of Telemental Health

## Receiving services via telemental health allows you to:

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| Receive services at times or in places where the service may not otherwise be available. |
| Receive services in a fashion that may be more convenient and less prone to delays than in-person meetings. |
| Receive services when you are unable to travel to the service counselor’s office. |
| The unique characteristics of telemental health media may also help some people make improved progress on health goals that may not have been otherwise achievable without telemental health. |

**Receiving services via telemental health has the following risks:**

Telemental health services can be impacted by technical failures, may introduce risks to your privacy, and may reduce your service counselor’s ability to directly intervene in crises or emergencies. Here is a non-exhaustive list of examples:

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| Internet connections and cloud services could cease working or become too unstable to use |
| Cloud-based service personnel, IT assistants, and malicious actors (“hackers”) may have the ability to access your private information that is transmitted or stored in the process of telemental health-based service delivery. |
| Computer or smartphone hardware can have sudden failures or run out of power, or local power services can go out. |

Interruptions may disrupt services at important moments, and your counselor may be unable to reach you quickly or using the most effective tools. Your counselor may also be unable to help you in-person.

There may be additional benefits and risks to telemental health services that arise from the lack of in-person contact or presence, the distance between you and your counselor at the time of service, and the technological tools used to deliver services. Your counselor will assess these potential benefits and risks, sometimes in collaboration with you, as your relationship progresses.

# Assessing Telemental Health’s Fit For You

Although it is well validated by research, service delivery via telemental health is not a good fit for every person. Your counselor will continuously assess if working via telemental health is appropriate for your case. If it is not appropriate, your counselor will help you find in-person counselors with whom to continue services.

Please talk to your counselor if you find the telemental health media so difficult to use that it distracts from the services being provided, if the medium causes trouble focusing on your services, or if there are any other reasons why the telemental health medium seems to be causing problems in receiving services. **Raising your questions or concerns will not, by itself, result in termination of services.** Bringing your concerns to your counselor is often a part of the process.

You also have a right to stop receiving services by telemental health at any time without prejudice. If your counselor also provides services in-person and you are reasonably able to access the counselor’s in-person services, you will not be prevented from accessing those services if you choose to stop using telemental health. Stipulations to in person services will be governed by the agency following city, state, and federal guidelines. Once the agency resumes in person services, clients will be able to return to received services on site.

# Your Telemental Health Environment

You will be responsible for creating a safe and confidential space during sessions. You should use a space that is free of other people. It should also be difficult or impossible for people outside the space to see or hear your interactions with your counselor during the session. If you are unsure of how to do this, please ask your counselor for assistance.

# Our Communication Plan

At our first session, we will develop a plan for backup communications in case of technology failures and a plan for responding to emergencies and mental health crises. In addition to those plans, your counselor has the following policies regarding communications:

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| The best way to contact your counselor between sessions is *<e.g. call by telephone at xxx-xxx-xxxx, or Signal text at xxx-xxx-xxxx.>*  *Do not give your personal phone number, create a google voice or other number specific for clients, set boundaries for such contact* |
| Your counselor will respond to your messages <e.g. within 24 business hours.> Please note that your counselor may not respond at all on weekends or holidays. Your counselor may also respond sooner than stated in this policy. That does not mean they will always respond that quickly. |

Our work is done primarily during our appointed sessions, which will generally occur during <e.g. normal working (agency) hours.>. Contact between sessions should be limited to:

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| Confirming or changing appointment times |
| Billing questions or issues |
| *[items specific to your practice]* |

Please note that all textual messages you exchange with your counselor, e.g. emails and text messages, will become a part of your health record. Such communication should be limited to the above.

# Our Safety and Emergency Plan

As a recipient of telemental health-based services, you will need to participate in ensuring your safety during mental health crises, medical emergencies, and sessions that you have with your counselor.

Your counselor will require you to designate an emergency contact. You will need to provide permission for your counselor to communicate with this person about your care during emergencies.

Your counselor will also develop with you a plan for what to do during mental health crises and emergencies, and a plan for how to keep your space safe during sessions. It is important that you engage with your counselor in the creation of these plans and that you follow them when you need to.

# Your Security and Privacy

Except where otherwise noted, your counselor employs software and hardware tools that adhere to security best practices and applicable legal standards for the purposes of protecting your privacy and ensuring that records of your health care services are not lost or damaged.

As with all things in telemental health, however, you also have a role to play in maintaining your security. Please use reasonable security protocols to protect the privacy of your own health care information. For example: when communicating with your counselor, use devices and service accounts that are protected by unique passwords that only you know. Also, use the secure tools that your counselor has supplied for communications.

# Recordings

Please do not record video or audio sessions without your counselor’s consent. Making recordings can quickly and easily compromise your privacy, and should be done so with great care. Your counselor will only record video or audio sessions with your permission. A separate consent for recording will be provided to you.