

# Life Skills Center

## Los Angeles Harbor college

### A Guide for Students to Telehealth Services:

In response to the travel restrictions and necessary social distancing imposed by COVID-19, most private Clinicians/psychotherapists, Clinics, and Community service providers have gone remotely. Therefore, the Life Skills Center is providing Telehealth Services remotely.

To help you make this transition as seamless as possible, we recommend that you read this guideline below what to expect in a teletherapy session, what equipment will make the connection better and secure, and how to set yourself up to make the most of your session.

### What is Teletherapy?

Teletherapy is a talk therapy session that occurs through phone or video call, rather than in-person. Through teletherapy, you meet with a licensed, qualified therapist or an MFT Associates or Predoctoral and Postdoctoral candidate Intern supervised by a licensed psychologist via a secure online platform from the convenience of your home or other private location.

### Pre-appointment preparation

1. **Sign any documents:** If you are trying it for the first time together, the therapist may review a teletherapy agreement with you and document verbally consent.
2. **Test out the platform.** There are multiple teletherapy platforms available and listed below. Some require you to download the program, while others may require a specific internet browser. To avoid technical issues, spend a few minutes following any setup instructions or testing the link your therapist sends you in advance!

### Equipment to prepare

1. **Fully charged laptop, desktop, or tablet with a webcam and audio connection.** If you can, have your device plugged in and charging during your session, or ensure the device is fully charged before your session.
2. **Earphones or headphones use is strongly** recommended to prevent sound echoing and to allow you to focus on the conversation with your therapist fully.
3. **High-speed internet** with a bandwidth of at least 10 Mbps is useful for the highest quality and to prevent connection issues. To check your internet connection, Google searches "internet speed test" and click on the blue button that says "Run Speed Test." If it shows your Wi-Fi is under 10mbps, you may want to restart your router or discuss an alternative option with your provider, such as a phone call.
4. **Use your phone as a backup.** Have a fully charged phone next to you as back up in case of any technical difficulties with your computer, which may require you to switch to a phone call or a different video call platform.

**Please make a note:** Phones are not recommended for teletherapy for the following reasons:

- There are more notifications you'll need to turn off to avoid disruption during a session.
- Your phone might run out of battery if you are using the jack for earphones rather than charging
- The screen is smaller, and therefore offers a less immersive therapy experience.

## Environment to prepare

1. **Proper lighting:** selecting a seat next to a window can provide sufficient natural light to come into the room, allowing the therapist to see your face during the session. Moving a desk lamp or standing lamp in front of you can also help to provide a transparent background.
2. **A quiet space:** Find a quiet area in your home: ideally in a private room, but a studio apartment, available closets, or the bathroom are also options. Shut windows, doors, and ask other household members to lower the sound of their music speakers or use silicone earplugs to block out noise.
3. **Privacy:** Sharing an apartment or house with other people? Let them know that you are having a therapy session (or if you're not comfortable with that, consider saying it is a "doctor's appointment" or "important private conversation"). You can put a "Do not disturb" sign on your door and lock the door, so you don't have to be worried about being distracted in the middle of your session. If there is no private, quiet indoor space available to you, consider your outdoor options. You might request a phone call from your therapist, which you could take walking around a park (or in your car, if you have one), or another safe, secluded outdoor area.

## Teletherapy video Chat platforms

Here are some secure and confidential teletherapy platforms your therapist may use: Remember, your therapist will send you a link to join the video call; follow the instructions for getting set up!

- **Doxy.me:** Here is [Doxy .me's guide for checking into your first visit](#). Note that Doxy.me requires you to use one of the following internet browsers: Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, or Safari 11+. Here are their [Doxy .me's system requirements](#). The video is conducted on your internet browser; no download of software download is necessary.
- **SimplePractice:** Here are [SimplePractice's comprehensive guides](#) for clients. The video is conducted on your internet browser; no download of software download is necessary.

## Getting ready for the appointment

1. **Set up your space.** Check your internet connection and make sure your area is set up comfortably 15min before your appointment. You might sit on a chair in front of a desk or table, or if you're seated on the ground, a meditation cushion can be a grounding option. As you're setting up, take this time to start quieting your mind and shift your attention from work, kids, or other commitments to therapy and healing.
2. **Close applications on your desktop, or use a separate new desktop.** Ensure there are no applications still running, which can help with internet speed and also prevent distractions in the middle of your appointment.
3. **Engage the senses:** Take a few moments to think about what would feel good to you *now*. Consider brewing a cup of herbal tea to sip on during the session, spritz some essential oils, or gather up a soft pillow or blanket to feel comfortable.
4. **Take a deep breath, close your eyes, and quiet your mind.** In the five minutes before the session, give yourself a big breath. You're here, you're making time for self-investment, and now all you need to focus on is the therapy session.
5. **Make a connection!** Click on the link your provider sent you in advance to launch into the session.

### Decompressing after the session

Since the commute to therapy is removed for an online session, it can be easy to jump right back into your home life around you – and harder to take time to process and register what you just covered with your therapist. Therefore, consider starting a therapy journal and spending as much time as you need or can to reflect on what you learned in therapy, and to prepare for your next session. This exercise can also help you make the most of your time with your therapist, and make your therapy journey overall more enjoyable.

### Does teletherapy work?

Studies show that teletherapy can be just as effective as in-person therapy sessions for a wide range of mental health challenges. For example, a 2018 study published in the Journal of Psychological Disorders found that online cognitive behavioral therapy was equally as effective as a face-to-face treatment for major depression, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder.

Also, telepsychiatry, or the psychiatric medication management conducted via video or phone call, has been empirically validated, as well. One study showed that telepsychiatry patients reported improved mental health after one month of sessions. In that same study, 93% felt they could present the same information as in an in-person study; 85% were comfortable in their ability to talk, and 96% were satisfied with the session.

Online therapy can be an empowering and accessible way to take care of your mental health, especially during times when it's not feasible to make a trip to your therapist's office. And just like in-person therapy, if you are committed to making the most of your therapy time, it can be a rewarding experience with long-term benefits.