

# Taking It Online: Tips for Effective Online School Counselling



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# Learning Objectives



- Identify benefits of remote counselling
- List practical strategies for transitioning online
- Understand unique aspects of confidentiality and privacy when working remotely
- Explain ethical and legal issues that may arise and identify approaches for risk management
- List ideas for engaging children and adolescents

# Introduction



**Dr. Alicia Janik, Psy.D.**

- **Licensed Clinical Psychologist**  
(Commonwealth of Virginia, United States)
- **More than 15 years of clinical experience**
- **6 years providing telepsychology services (therapy and consultation) with the Truman Group**
- **Facilitates peer consultation groups for school counselors from AISA and other international school organizations**

# Benefits of Remote Work



- Gain more context and understanding of client's natural space and environment
- Client may feel more at ease in their own/familiar space
- Able to generalize skills to current environment
- Similar satisfaction ratings to in person
- Children and teens are sometimes even more comfortable and open on remote platforms ("technology natives")
- Less stigma with peers (less visibility)
- Easier access to parents/family members

# Logistics - Technology



- **Technology is not perfect – it fails**
  - Having backup devices/networks
  - Being honest
  - Have a sense of humor
  - Be flexible
- **Internet connection**
  - Send tips ahead of time
  - Wifi – private connection (not public)
  - Close to router (directly connected is best with hardline)
  - Minimize multiple connections (maybe not possible)
- **Audio**
  - Using headphones
  - Give client feedback
  - Minimize background noise/distractions

# Logistics - Technology



- **Backup plan for troubleshooting**
  - Create plan prior to or at start of session
  - What to do if either end gets disconnected (have backup devices ready)
  - Have Contact information readily available
- **Telehealth platforms**
  - HIPAA secure platform with BAA
  - Zoom, Doxy.me, Simple Practice, Theralink, Vsee, Secure Video, WebEx
  - Increased security if the platform has unique link for each meeting with password

# Logistics - Technology



- **Minimize technological distractions**
  - Turn off cell phones
  - Disable alerts that are connected to the device you/they are using
- **Devices**
  - Use devices you are already familiar with and practice first
  - Have multiple devices available
  - Connect to power source if possible
- **Socialize client to videoconferencing**
- **Encourage them to prepare ahead of time**

# Logistics - Physical



- **Positioning and Lighting – for you and the client**
- **Boundaries**
  - Put sign on your door and let others know not to disturb (client may as well)
  - Different space for work/professional calls versus personal calls
- **Appropriateness**
  - Dress/attire
  - Posture
  - Behaviors
  - Backdrop – neutral, child-friendly, not overly personal or distracting, familiar, same each time

# Logistics - Physical



- Confirm location of services being provided (consistent with best practices)
- Consider time of day
- Private space with minimal distractions
  - “I can only see what is on the screen”
  - Ask more questions/be curious
  - Children and teens often prefer having more space to be able to move around

# Logistics – Therapeutic Alliance



- **Set up Rules/Expectations**
  - Developmentally appropriate
  - Agreeing to not engage in other tasks
  - Length of meetings
  - Comfort in space they are in (re: privacy)
- **Lean slightly forward and look directly into the camera (adjust height of camera as necessary) to show engagement and empathy**
- **Animate yourself by about 10% to be equally effective (but try to avoid excessive gesturing or rocking in chair etc.)**

# Logistics – Transition to Telehealth Platform



- **Use checklist** (See resources)
- **Practice makes perfect (or at least smoother)**
  - Try making calls with others
  - Ask for honest feedback
- **Document rationale for shift in modality**
  - COVID-19
  - Location of client at time of meeting
  - Who is present and why
  - Include assessment of appropriateness for modality

# Confidentiality and Privacy



- **Provide informed consent with family to include:**
  - What will be the focus of meetings (generally)
  - What will you share/not share with parents?
  - How involved will they be?
  - Mandated reporting (when/how)
  - Limitations of tele-counseling sessions
  - Discuss security and risks of technology/platform used
- **Communicate and set limits**
  - How often and when will you connect with them
  - How can they reach you
  - Limiting transmission of private information (save for live interactions)
  - No recording of sessions (for their own privacy)

# Navigating privacy: when everyone is at home



- **Complications**
  - Was the student already seeing you in-person? If so, was the family?
  - Socializing parents to counseling in general
- **Private space**
- **Thin walls/background noises**
- **Flexibility re: what is feasible**
- **Get creative**
  - Identify code words for sensitive topics or information
  - Adjust how you ask questions
  - Talking out loud versus typing responses via chat functions/drawing

# Ethics and Risk Management



- Have contact numbers and emails readily available
- Know local resources
- Know local laws/regulations re: telehealth practice
- Know your governing body's guidance and ethical practices re: telehealth
- Is the presenting issue appropriate or feasible via remote work? If not, shift focus/modality
- Assess risk as necessary (abuse, neglect, self-harm, domestic violence, suicidal ideation etc.)

# Ethics and Risk Management



- Plan for the unexpected (client slams computer closed/ends call)
- Interjurisdictional practice
- Regulations changing frequently amidst COVID-19
- Being flexible and using clinical judgment
  - Not *just* about the “rules”
- Contact colleagues to consult

# Communication Challenges & Tips



- **Watch for signs of abuse and neglect**
  - Relevant history/context
  - COVID-19 and related adjustments are MAJOR stressor
  - Gather collateral information
  - Increased risk for domestic violence (pressure cooker)
  - Intervention is not only with the student
- **Behavioral and symptom regression**
  - Normalize
  - Review previous strategies
  - Adjust/tweak strategies and supports given new context

# Engaging children and teens remotely



- Resiliency demo: Dr. Mary Alvrod  
(rubberband, turtle, remote control)
- Have them show you or share personally salient items
- Use exaggerated expressions/gestures as needed  
(virtual high-fives, thumbs up, fist bump, Dab etc.)
- Introduce pets (yours or theirs)
- Screen time (what can they do that is NOT focused on the screen)

# Engaging children and teens remotely



- Movement breaks
- May use more summary statements, reflections, and observations to remind client that you are present/listening
- Consider engaging adolescents by exploring an online site together (obtain parent permission to access other internet based platforms first)

# Engaging children and teens remotely



- **Session may be much shorter than in-person!**
- **Translating in-person activities to remote**
  - Using whiteboard/screen share of PowerPoint presentation/holding things up to camera
  - Encouraging parents to have certain items available to student (what do you have in your office and what do they have available at home – toy figures, Uno, Battleship etc.)
  - Supplies for you: art supplies, paper, puppets, games/toys)
  - Virtual games (tic tac toe on whiteboard, Unofreak for online play etc.)
  - Creating shared drawings (writing in thought/conversation bubbles)
- **Feeling, Body, Thoughts, Behaviors Box**
- **Virtual Hope Box**
- **Mood Coach – VA, free, research behind it**
- **Groups**
  - Lunch bunch
  - Relaxation/mindfulness exercises (5 senses, deep breathing, mindful walking, describing an item)
  - Have everyone stay on mute unless speaking
  - Content based – anxiety or stress management, problem solving,

# Challenges and Self Care



- “Zoom fatigue”
  - Feeling more exhausted after live video calls/interactions
  - Sense of performing /feeling “on” all of the time
- **TIPS:**
  - Take more breaks
  - Build in transition
  - Limit video calls as much as possible (save for most important contacts like counseling sessions)
  - Create physical boundaries/space
  - Technology-free time  
(outside/nature/reading/cooking/art/music/exercise etc.)

# References and Resources



- American Psychological Association : Comparing the latest telehealth solutions: <https://www.apaservices.org/practice/business/technology/tech-column/telehealth-solutions>
- American Psychological Association : Office and Technology Checklist for Telepsychology <https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/telepsychological-services-checklist>
- Seager van Dyk, I., Kroll, J. L., Martinez, R. G., & Donoghue Emerson, N. (March 2020) COVID-19 Tips: APA: <https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/telepsychological-services-checklist>
- American Psychological Association Telepsychology Best Practices 101 Training Series (currently free related to COVID-19 and an excellent resource/training!): <https://apa.content.online/catalog/product.xhtml?eid=15132&eid=1921>
- American Psychological Association : Connecting with children and adolescents for telehealth during COVID-19 <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/telehealth-children>

# References and Resources



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- American Psychological Association : Telehealth Guidance by State during COVID-19: <https://www.apaservices.org/practice/clinic/covid-19-telehealth-state-summary>
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- Building Rapport with Youth via Telehealth <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340066049>

# References and Resources



- National Register COVID-19 resources: <https://www.nationalregister.org/coronavirus-resources/>
- Telebehavioral Health Institute: <https://telehealth.org/>
- Higher Education Mental Health Alliance: [http://hemha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HEMHA-Distance-Counseling\\_FINAL2019.pdf](http://hemha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HEMHA-Distance-Counseling_FINAL2019.pdf)
- Mood Coach (Free application via U.S. Veterans Affairs) <https://www.mobile.va.gov/app/mood-coach>
- Myers K, Nelson E-L, Rabinowitz T, et al. American Telemedicine Association Practice Guidelines for Telemental Health with Children and Adolescents (2017). *Telemedicine Journal And E-Health: The Official Journal of The American Telemedicine Association*, 23(10):779-804. doi:10.1089/tmj.2017.0177.
- Virtual Hope Box (Free application via U.S. Veterans Affairs) [https://www.research.va.gov/research\\_in\\_action/Virtual-Hope-Box-smartphone-app-to-prevent-suicide.cfm](https://www.research.va.gov/research_in_action/Virtual-Hope-Box-smartphone-app-to-prevent-suicide.cfm)

# Contact information



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