



Frequently Asked Questions About Telemental Health with Kids

What is telemental health, and what does that look like with children?

Telemental health refers to psychological services provided using technology rather than in-person appointments. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, many therapists are providing services this way in order to maximize care and availability while minimizing risk.

Telemental health sessions can look very similar to in-person sessions, and there are many play activities that can be done online. Many of these games have a similar feel and experience when done online, but there are some differences. For example, some children like to change the rules of games during play therapy, and some online versions of the games do not allow this. However, this can be helpful in teaching certain skills, like impulse control, emotion regulation, and other coping skills.

Is telemental health effective with kids?

Although child-specific outcome research is still limited, long-term studies show that telemental health is comparable to in-person sessions in terms of therapy outcomes. The current available research shows that kids can engage and benefit from telehealth to treat issues including anxiety, depression, ADHD, adjustment issues, and behavioral problems.

What does my child need for their sessions?

When it is time for their session, your child needs a quiet space with privacy and minimal distractions. If your child wants to bring something to share in the session, like a toy, stuffed animal, or family pictures, that is fine! They can also bring art supplies if they want that to be a component of our session. We don't want them to be overwhelmed or to have a distracting environment, so added toys and items can be minimal. They can always go get something if they need it during the appointment.

What device should my child use during their telehealth session?

Any device with a camera, microphone, and internet connection can work for telemental health. However, the features available on Zoom do vary depending on what you are using. Ideally, if your child can use a computer or laptop for their appointments, this will give us access to the most options for their sessions. We can still do sessions on a tablet, smart phone, or Chrome book, but some activities might not be available.

What should I (the parent/guardian) do during sessions?

While I am meeting with your child individually, it is important for them to have privacy, just like in my office. You can be close by but not in the therapy space so we can reach you if your child



needs help during the session. If your child is very young and needs support to stay engaged in the session, we will talk about what that looks like for your child.

Since it is important for us to communicate about your child's treatment, I can meet with you either at the start or end of your child's session for an update. However, if you want to update me and are concerned about your child overhearing, you are welcome to send me an email either before or after the session, or we can speak on the phone.

What if my child can't engage with telemental health?

Like any service, telemental health is not perfect and might not be the right fit for every child. Many kids have been able to engage in telemental health, including kids whose parents were not sure if they would benefit from telehealth sessions. I encourage you to let your child try telemental health, and if it is not effective, we can discuss options for in-person sessions in a way that is safe.

What if my child wants to turn off their video?

Especially with the rise of online learning, many kids get tired of video meetings. Zoom fatigue is real! If your child wants to turn off their video for part or all of the session, this is okay. I can continue to engage them even if I can't see them. As long as they are interactive, they can choose to turn off the video if they would like.

What if my child wants to play on a different app during their session?

My job as a child therapist is not always to direct a specific activity; rather, my job is to take what the child chooses and make that activity therapeutic. Rapport is essential, and part of that is allowing the child to have some control over the activities we do in sessions. Letting your child share an app that they like can build relationship, and I can find ways to tie different activities into their treatment plan.

What if my child has an emotional outburst during the session?

Because they are in their home environment, children might be more likely to show problem behaviors during telehealth sessions. This can be good information for me to observe, since I can see what the behavior looks like rather than just hearing a description, and I can help them practice coping skills in real time. If your child is having trouble in a way that keeps them from staying engaged in the session, I will call you and ask you to join us and help them de-escalate.

What are your (my child's therapist) qualifications to provide telemental health to children?

My ethics code requires that I receive training to be competent in telehealth before providing this service. In compliance with this, I completed training in 2017 in order to provide telemental health services and created a telemental health ethics training through Sioux Falls Psychological



Services. In April 2020, I additionally completed an extensive training and became certified in telemental health through Professional Education Systems Institute (PESI). In addition, I worked with PESI to create a certification for telemental health with children and adolescents.

How is (name of activity) therapeutic or beneficial for my child?

Psychotherapy services for kids look different than for adults; this is true with in-person sessions and telemental health sessions. We know that kids process emotion through play rather than talk a lot of the time, so as a child therapist, I create space for this to happen in a way that is developmentally appropriate. In addition, therapy with your child is only helpful if your child is able to trust me and have a positive relationship with me. This means that sometimes they will request an activity that might not appear “therapeutic.” Research has shown that this approach is effective in treating a lot of different issues.

If you have questions or concerns about a specific activity or any aspect of your child’s treatment, please reach out to me.

How do I schedule a telehealth appointment for my child?

Questions related to my clinical practice must be directed to Sioux Falls Psychological Services at www.offermehope.com or (605)334-2696.