

Dear Clients,

Please review this document prior to our online session.

### **Important Information Regarding The Use of Psychological Services Online**

1. Psychological services being offered online is a fairly new option in the field of mental health care. Relative to standard ‘face-to-face’ therapy, there is less research and theory on things like effectiveness, client-therapist relationship, and ethical considerations.

Therefore, it is important to note that although the research that has been completed to date on online psychological services has been very promising, anyone considering online psychological services should bear in mind the limitations in knowledge, the possibility that it may not be as effective as standard therapy/services, as well as other potential limitations.

There are many factors to consider when psychological services are provided via the internet. For instance, the client-therapist/psychologist/psychological associate relationship could be inferior to standard therapy/psychology services. Also, since effective communication involves both verbal and nonverbal components, it is possible that both you and your mental health provider may have less than optimal communication via the internet, as opposed to standard therapy/psychology services. There is also the possibility that problems with the technology (e.g. losing the internet signal, power failure, etc.) could cause problems during the services.

Alternatively, there are some potential benefits to online services. For instance, clients may feel more comfortable in their own home, and they may have more flexibility in scheduling appointments. Online therapy is also a nice option for those living in regions where access to services is less than adequate.

2. While your clinicians can research the security of a particular online tool (eg.,: doxy.me, zoom), the clinician is not an internet security expert. Also, the internet is constantly evolving and changing in terms of online security and threats to such security. Therefore, clients should bear in mind that there is some loss of control over issues of confidentiality and privacy, in that your clinician cannot guarantee complete security of information exchanged.

In researching various options for online services, I have found that doxy.me appears to offer excellent security for health information and confidentiality. The following are key features of doxy.me:

- a. It does not store or record any online sessions (unless it is requested, which I would never do).
- b. It encrypts the data being streamed during the online session. This means that online therapy/psychological service sessions should be well protected from hackers.

- c. The company doxy.me does not have the key to the encrypted data, so they cannot have access to the online session being streamed.

However, some limitations and considerations are important to review, including the following issues:

- a. When using the internet there is always the potential for a privacy breach.
- b. Discussions are only as private as the space we are in, and clients are encouraged to find a private space that is free from distractions during their virtual session.
  - If there are others in the client's room during a virtual session, the client should announce their presence so that the therapist/psychologist/psychological associate can monitor what is being shared/disclosed at that time.
  - It is important for clients to use a secure internet connection (password protected home internet) and not a public/free Wi-Fi.
  - No one will record the session without permission from the other person.
  - Clients are encouraged to let their clinician know if they do not feel comfortable continuing in a virtual setting.
3. For online sessions, you will be provided with an internet link prior to the session that will let you connect with your clinician. You are encouraged to try this link prior to the meeting to ensure that everything works smoothly. Should you have any difficulties please contact our offices at 613-726-7355 or through email at [info@cfpe.ca](mailto:info@cfpe.ca).
4. For online sessions, clinicians will wait for 15 minutes for clients. If you have difficulties connecting please contact our office. Clients that are later than 15 minutes will have to reschedule their session. Typically, they will be billed for the missed session.
5. Due to the fact that loss of communication could happen at any point during online service (e.g. loss of internet connection), it is important to have a plan in place.
  - a. First, should the connection be lost, the clinician will try and re-establish a connection immediately, and will try several times to do so.
  - b. If an online connection cannot be re-established, the clinician will try and call you at your preferred phone number, in order to discuss how best to proceed. Please keep in mind that phones are also not secure and have many of the same vulnerabilities as those described above.
  - c. Should the clinician be unable to re-establish communication with the client, fees will be assessed at a pro-rated fee for the amount of time used (e.g. 30 minutes of a 50- minute session would be billed for half the rate) or the opportunity to finish the session at a later time.
  - d. The clinician also requires the address of the client as well as the number of local police and emergency services. As in standard therapy/psychological services, if the clinician believes there is a risk of harm to the client (e.g., suicide) or to

another person (e.g., violence), the clinician must take steps to prevent such an occurrence. Similarly, if the internet connection with your clinician is lost and the clinician cannot contact the client via phone, the clinician may contact third parties if there is a concern for safety.

6. As with regular face-to-face therapy, clinicians maintain a regular file on each client in accordance with existing professional standards. These files are kept in a secure location.
7. Your clinician may suspend, change, or terminate online services in the following scenarios:
  - a. The clinician decides that the client's problems cannot be adequately addressed via online services.
  - b. An unforeseen logistical or therapeutic/psychological service problem arises
  - c. An unforeseen ethical problem arises.

Any decision made by the clinician will be reviewed with the client.

8. In accordance with recommendations by the Canadian Psychological Association, I offer to clients from Ontario the contact information of the provincial regulatory body of psychologists and psychological associates – The College of Psychologists of Ontario. Clients wanting more information about the practice of psychology in Ontario can contact this organization at:

Web: [www.cpo.ca](http://www.cpo.ca)

Tele: (800) 489-8388

### References

- Richards & Vigano (2013). Online counseling: A narrative and critical review of the literature. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 79*, 994-1011.
- Rochlen et al. (2004). Online therapy: Review of relevant definitions, debates and current empirical support. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 60*, 269-283.
- Spence et al. (2011). A randomized controlled trial of online versus clinic-based CBT for adolescent anxiety. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 79*, 629-642.