

Online coaching, counseling, consulting: *Getting the most from your appointment*

We are sharing this guide to help you prepare for your online appointments. Whether this is your first session or you've done this before, the information here will help you create a comfortable and confidential environment for your session.

What You'll Find Here:

- I. **Creating Confidential Space:** Tips on finding a private and secure space for your session.
- II. **Technical Setup:** Guidance on setting up your device and ensuring a stable internet connection.
- III. **Session Etiquette:** Best practices to make the most of your session.
- IV. **Managing Disruptions:** How to manage unexpected interruptions or technical issues.
- V. **Understanding Confidentiality:** Valuable information about the limits of confidentiality in online therapy.
- VI. **Handling Emergencies:** Steps to take if an emergency arises during your session.





Let's make sure you're fully prepared so you can focus on what matters most—the meaningful exploration of your life and personal goals.

I. Creating a Confidential Space

To ensure that your therapy session stays private and comfortable, it's essential to create a confidential space. Here are some key considerations:


Things to Consider:

Is the space private?

-  **Can you lock the door?**
 - If not, will others who have access to the space respect your request for privacy and not enter the room?
 -  **Have a conversation:** Discuss your need for privacy with others in your household.
-  **Can others outside the room hear you talking?**
 - Use white noise (e.g., a fan) placed outside the door to muffle sound.
 - Consider using  **headphones or earbuds** to keep the session private.

Alternative Spaces in an Apartment:



If you live in an apartment complex and it's difficult to find an ideal space, consider the following options. These aren't perfect, but they can work in a pinch. Make sure the space is comfortable for you, as comfort is key to a successful session.

- **Bathroom:** Though unconventional, bathrooms often provide good sound insulation and privacy, especially if they have a lock.
- **Walk-In Closet:** If available, this can be a quiet, secluded spot.
- **Balcony or Patio:** If your apartment has a balcony or patio that's relatively private and quiet, this could be a good option, especially with headphones.
- **Bedroom:** The bedroom, especially if it has a lock, can serve as a private space, particularly during times when others are not around.
- **Corner of a Larger Room:** Use room dividers or curtains to create a makeshift secluded area in a larger room.
- **Community Room or Lounge:** If your apartment complex has a shared community room or lounge that isn't frequently used, it might be worth exploring this option for privacy.
-  **Last Resort:** Your car, parked in a safe, private spot (but ensure the location is secure and not too secluded).



II. Technical Setup

A well-prepared technical setup is crucial for a smooth and effective online therapy session. Follow these guidelines to ensure everything is ready:



1. Choose the Right Device:

-  **Laptop or Desktop Computer:** These are ideal due to their larger screens, which help you to more easily see and interact with your practitioner more easily.
-  **Tablet or Phone:** If using a smaller device, make sure it's stable and steady and that the camera is positioned correctly.




2. Position Your Camera:

-  **Eye-Level Camera:** Position your camera at eye level. Use books or other items to prop up your device or monitor if needed.
-  **Background Considerations:** Ensure your background is tidy and free of distractions. Avoid having a bright light source directly behind you.


3. Optimize Your Lighting:

-  **Good Lighting:** Ensure you are well-lit. Natural light from a window is great, but if that's not possible, use a lamp positioned to the side or in front of you.
-  **Avoid Backlighting:** Avoid bright lights directly behind you, which can make you appear as a silhouette.

4. Clear Your Internet Connection:

-  **Strong Connection:** Move your device as close as possible to your Wi-Fi router for a stronger connection.
-  **Wired Connection:** If possible, use an Ethernet cable to connect directly to the router for the best stability.
-  **Close Unnecessary Programs:** Shut down any programs or apps that may be using bandwidth to avoid slowdowns or interruptions.


5. Minimize Background Motion:

-  **Eliminate Distractions:** Try to eliminate any background motion within the camera's view, such as ceiling fans, TV screens, or moving objects. A consistent and steady background helps support a better connection.




III. Session Protocols & Etiquette

Following a few simple guidelines can help make your online session more effective for both you and your practitioner. Here's how you can ensure a smooth experience:


1. Get Ready to Start:

 **Be Ready a Few Minutes Early:** If possible, try to log in 2-3 minutes before your session is scheduled to begin. This gives you time to settle in and make sure everything is working smoothly.



2. Minimize Distractions:

-  **Quiet the Noise:** Turn off or silence your phone and any other devices that might interrupt your session.
-  **Let Others Know:** If you have others in your home, kindly let them know you're in a session and would appreciate not being disturbed. A "Do Not Disturb" sign can help!
-  **Find Your Spot and Stay Put:** Pick a comfy spot and try to stay in one place during the session, avoiding unnecessary movement or multitasking.



3. Dress Comfortably but Appropriately:

 **Wear What Feels Right:** You don't need to dress up but wearing something comfortable and appropriate helps maintain a positive atmosphere during your session.

4. Stay Present:

-  **Be Here Now:** Focus on the conversation and try to avoid distractions like checking emails or browsing the web. Your full attention helps you get the most out of your session.
-  **Show You're Engaged:** Nod, maintain eye contact (through the camera), and respond thoughtfully to show you're fully involved in the conversation.

5. Respect the Virtual Space:



-  **Speak Clearly and Slowly:** When possible, speak at a moderate pace. If your natural pace is slow, that's fine, too!
-  **Share Any Issues:** If you're having trouble hearing or seeing your practitioner, or if something isn't working on your end, let them know so it can be addressed.

6. Wrap Up Together: Wait until your practitioner formally ends the session before logging off. This ensures that all topics are covered, and any next steps are clear.



IV. Managing Disruptions

Even with the best preparation, unexpected disruptions can happen during an online session. Here's how to handle them smoothly:



1. Handling Interruptions:

-  **Pause and Address:** If someone enters the room or there's a sudden noise, it's okay to pause the session for a moment. Kindly let the person know you're in a private session and ask for the space to be respected.
-  **Mute as Needed:** If there's background noise that you can't control, such as construction or loud neighbors, consider muting your microphone when you're not speaking to minimize distractions.





2. Technical Issues:

-  **Reconnect:** If your video freezes or the connection drops, try reconnecting to the session. If the issue persists, let your practitioner know by phone or email so you can reschedule or continue another way.
-  **Troubleshoot Quickly:** Sometimes, simply turning off your video for a few moments can help stabilize the connection. If other technical issues arise, try restarting your device or closing unnecessary apps.

3. Noise and Visual Distractions:

-  **Close Doors and Windows:** Reduce outside noise by closing doors and windows. This helps create a quieter environment for your session.
-  **Silence Notifications:** Turn off notifications on your devices to prevent pop-ups and sounds from distracting you during the session.

4. Plan for the Unexpected:



-  **Keep a Backup Device Ready:** If possible, have a backup device like a phone or tablet nearby in case your primary device fails.
-  **Establish a Backup Communication Plan:** Discuss with your practitioner how to continue if a disruption can't be resolved quickly, such as switching to a phone call.
-  **Practitioner Will Reach Out:** If communications are interrupted for more than a minute, your practitioner will try to reach out by texting you to check with you on re-connecting.
-  **Near the End of the Session:** If a disruption occurs after the session has already run 40-45 minutes and is near the end, your practitioner may suggest concluding the session and scheduling a follow-up.

V. Limits of Confidentiality




Your privacy is of utmost importance, and your practitioner is dedicated to supporting the confidentiality of your sessions. Confidentiality is the foundation of a safe space where you can talk openly about anything and everything. However, there are certain situations where confidentiality may have legal or ethical limits.

Here's what you need to know:



1. Confidentiality in Online Sessions:

-  **Secure Platform:** Your sessions are conducted on a secure platform designed to protect your privacy. Your practitioner follows best practices to ensure that your information stays confidential.
-  **Private Environment:** To further protect your confidentiality, it's important to be in a private space during the session where you won't be overheard or interrupted.

2. Situations Where Confidentiality May Be Limited:

-  **Keeping Everyone Safe:** While confidentiality is crucial, your practitioner will do everything realistically possible to keep you and others safe. If there's a clear and imminent risk of harm, they may need to take steps to prevent that harm.
-  **Legal Requirements:** In some situations, such as responding to a court order, your practitioner may be legally bound to release information from your sessions.
-  **Reporting Abuse:** If your practitioner becomes aware of abuse or neglect of a child, elderly person, or dependent adult, they may be required to report this information to the appropriate authorities.

3. What You Can Do:

-  **Ask Questions:** If you have any concerns or questions about confidentiality, feel free to discuss them with your practitioner, who can provide more detailed information about how your privacy is protected.
-  **Keep It Private:** Avoid discussing session details in public or shared spaces, even after the session has ended. Your privacy is important, both during and after the session.

VI. Handling Emergencies

While it's unlikely that an emergency will occur during your online therapy session, it's important to be prepared just in case. Here's what you need to know:

1. Have an Emergency Plan:

- 📞 **Know Your Contacts:** Make sure you have the contact information for local emergency services and any relevant crisis hotlines. Remember that 9-1-1 is location-specific, so it's crucial to know the direct numbers for emergency services in your area.
- 🔍 **Finding Numbers:** You can usually find local emergency contact numbers through an online search, your phone directory, or by asking your local service provider.
- 🏠 **Know Your Location:** Be aware of your exact location during the session so that you can quickly share it with emergency services if needed.

2. During the Session:

- 🚨 **If You Experience a Crisis:** If you feel overwhelmed or in crisis during the session, let your practitioner know at once. They can help guide you through the situation and decide on the best course of action.
- 🆘 **Unexpected Events:** If an emergency occurs (such as a sudden health issue or a safety concern in your environment), inform your practitioner as soon as possible. Depending on the situation, they may recommend pausing the session or taking further steps to ensure your safety.

3. After the Session:

- 📱 **Stay Connected:** If an emergency occurs during the session and you need to end it early, your practitioner will follow up with you to check in and discuss next steps.
- 📅 **Rescheduling:** If the session is interrupted by an emergency, your practitioner will collaborate with you to reschedule or find another way to complete the session.

4. Emergency Resources:

- 📞 **Crisis Hotlines:** Your practitioner can provide you with a list of crisis hotlines and resources that are available 24/7 if you need immediate help outside of session times.
- 🏥 **Medical Emergencies:** In the case of a medical emergency, it's important to contact emergency services right away. Your practitioner can aid by providing guidance until help arrives, if possible.