

SMART LOVE[®]

FAMILY SERVICES



Benefits of Telehealth Therapy for Children



Parents understandably wonder if children are able to benefit from virtual therapy sessions due to their developmental level. While in person psychotherapy sessions are best for a client of any age, virtual sessions still offer many benefits including for children! **The most important factor is that children are able to connect with their therapist--a virtual connection is much better than no connection at all. (Please see point about common behaviors in child telehealth below in red).** Therapists are trained on how to engage children during virtual sessions in a way that may be slightly different than in-person sessions. But the focus remains the same—child clients will still be able to use their therapy time to get help for their feelings in the way they want, including talking and/or playing. Therapists will continue to make observations about the child's feelings and provide helpful reflections to support the child and help them cope during this very difficult time. It is important to keep in mind that the current health crisis may last for a significant period of time in which virtual visits are the only option we have to provide care. Therefore, it is essential that children's therapy is able to continue or that children/teens needing therapy for the first time are able to get it.

Children benefit from having the following:

- Consistent structure during a period of immense change and uncertainty.
- Trusting relationship that is available for ongoing support /care during a very stressful time.
- Getting help with their unhappy and worried feelings about the big losses occurring in their lives:
 - Not attending school or having a familiar routine
 - Not seeing friends and teachers
 - Not being able to do fun activities outside the home
- Getting help with their anxiety, worries, and fear about themselves/loved ones getting sick or the family enduring financial strain.
- Support of their constructive, positive motives to take good care of themselves and still be able to feel good about themselves and enjoy constructive pleasure despite all the losses.
- Support to work on treatment goals that would be the same as in-person therapy.

The following are ways to enhance the virtual experience for children in their homes:

- Ideally, the child can be in a private space such as their bedroom. It is important they have privacy.
- **Parent or caregiving adult should be nearby** to step in if therapist reaches out to parent via phone in order to regulate any unsafe behavior or to help child come back to the session if necessary.
- Parent should also be nearby if there are technical problems. It is helpful to have a backup plan for the session (phone, for example, if internet goes down).
- Sessions take place at their regular in person appointment time or a new time that remains consistent as much as possible.
- Child can have toys, games, and even snacks as they would in-person sessions.

Important Heads Up About Common Behaviors During Telehealth Sessions!

Child/teen therapy is different than adult therapy and this also pertains to Telehealth sessions. Children and teens often demonstrate common behaviors that parents may understandably misinterpret to mean that their child is not engaging in therapy or that telehealth is not helping/working. For example, children can have a

harder time staying consistently engaged in front of a screen for their appointment. They may want to show the therapist other rooms in the house, the family pet, or introduce other family members! They may spend time on their phones, on their computers playing video games alone or with the therapist, be silent, or may want to do their homework. **Rest assured there is still a helpful therapeutic process occurring!** The most helpful response from parents is to be positive about the child's motives to be involved with the therapist however they choose to be as long as it is safe. The one time to intervene more actively is if a child leaves the Telehealth session—the parent can bring the child back to the screen and try to help the child stay on the session for the duration. Lastly, length of sessions may understandably vary—they may not be as long as in-person appointments. But therapists will help children stay connected as long as is workable for the child. Briefer therapy sessions are better than no therapy in our professional view.

We are here to answer any questions or address any concerns that parents have about telehealth therapy for children and teens. We understand this is uncharted territory for many!

Smart Love Therapists

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