

Best Practices for ENGAGING FAMILIES AND CHILDREN VIA ZOOM or other Electronic Means



SET THE STAGE

- Minimize distractions in the camera view of your workspace. Similarly, encourage the client or their caregiver to minimize the distractions in the room where the session is taking place.¹
- Ensure your camera is close enough that clients can see your facial expressions.
- During the initial meeting, give clients a virtual tour of your office. This can ease anxiety by showing them that no one else is in the room.

INTRODUCE CLIENTS TO TELEHEALTH

Let the client know that:

- The session is happening as you speak. You can help the client understand this by commenting on what the client is wearing or their gestures. Let them know that everything they can see about you, you can see about them.
- Reassure the client that that the session is private and that even though it is taking place over the internet it cannot be viewed or found online by others.²

FOCUS ON NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Use exaggerated facial expressions and gestures like thumbs up and virtual high five's to connect with the client.³

Note: Some clients may be distracted by their image on the screen. If so, teach them how to turn this off or have the caregiver do this for the child before your next meeting.

ENGAGE BETWEEN MEETINGS

During this time of socially distancing, many people feel disconnected. Sending caring messages between meetings can help clients feel less alone. Sending [caring postcards](#) has been a way that suicide prevention agencies have reached out to clients to ease the negative consequences of social isolation on mental health.⁴

MAINTAIN PRIVACY

- If a client is uncomfortable about being overheard, encourage them to use the chatting feature to message what they don't feel comfortable saying out loud.⁵
- If a client's space lacks privacy, brainstorm possible ways for them to attain privacy such as having the session in a parked car, bathroom, or while on a walk.⁶
- Since clients will often be meeting in their home, be observant of changes. If a parent, sibling, or spouse enters the room, check in with the client to make sure they are comfortable to continue the discussion.⁷

BE FLEXIBLE

Be prepared to adjust to technological challenges and inevitable disruptions.

- Think about adapting your meetings to better suit the needs of your clients. For example, parents likely will not have anyone to supervise their children and may benefit from meeting more frequently for shorter amounts of time.⁸

ENGAGING YOUTH

The best way to engage children over Zoom is to make the visit as interactive as possible and follow the child's lead. If they lose attention, switch to a more interactive activity.⁹

- Ask young children to show you what they like about their home. Encourage them to hold drawings up the camera and explain them. This will also help you assess the child's attention, fine motor skills, and creativity.
- Use what the child has been doing at home to engage them. Ask about games or movies that the child has been playing or watching. Ask them what their favorite character was and why, followed up by how they are like the character or not.
- To engage adolescents, ask if they have journaling, art, music or anything else they'd like to share with you or explore an online sit together like YouTube or Facebook.
- Try using different techniques to engage with the client. Zoom has a "whiteboard" feature where two people can draw together or play tic-tac-toe.¹⁰

ZOOM ENGAGEMENT FEATURES

- [In-Meeting Chat](#): This feature allows you to send written messages within a meeting.
- [Sharing a Whiteboard](#): The whiteboard feature allows you and participants to draw on the screen together.
- [Nonverbal Feedback](#): This feature allows meeting participants to place an icon besides their name to communicate, such as a question or clapping emoji.
- [Polling](#): Polling allows you to create single and multiple-choice questions for your participants to answer.

References

- 1 [Tips & practices for providing telephone and video conference mental health services.](#) Wayne State University, 2020.
- 2 [COVID-19 Tips: Building rapport with youth via telehealth.](#) 2020.
- 3 [COVID-19 Telehealth Communication Tips.](#) Ariadne Labs, 2020.
- 4 [Now Matters Now cards.](#) Now Matters Now, 2018.
- 5 [COVID-19 Tips: Building rapport with youth via telehealth.](#) 2020.
- 6 [Tips & practices for providing telephone and video conference mental health services.](#) Wayne State University, 2020.
- 7 [COVID-19 Telehealth Communication Tips.](#) Ariadne Labs, 2020.
- 8 [Tips & practices for providing telephone and video conference mental health services.](#) Wayne State University, 2020.
- 9 [Successful Video Visits with Young Children.](#) National Council on Crime & Delinquency, 2020.
- 10 [COVID-19 Tips: Building rapport with youth via telehealth.](#) 2020.