

Quick Guide: Ethical Best Practices in Telehealth

Objective: To provide clinicians with guidelines for maintaining ethical, legal, and professional standards in telehealth and virtual counseling.

Ethical Issue	Best Practice
Ensuring privacy in virtual sessions.	Conduct telehealth in secure, soundproof locations and use encrypted, HIPAA-compliant platforms (e.g., Zoom for Healthcare, Doxy.me, SimplePractice).
Managing crisis situations in remote care.	Establish emergency contact procedures, conduct risk assessments, and identify local crisis resources before beginning treatment.
Informed consent for telehealth.	Provide a clear telehealth consent form outlining confidentiality, limitations, and emergency protocols.
Verifying client identity and location.	Confirm client identity and current location at the start of each session for legal and safety purposes.
Handling technical issues ethically.	Have backup communication methods (e.g., phone calls) in case of connectivity issues.
Ensuring cultural and accessibility considerations.	Offer language interpretation, closed captions, or alternative formats to accommodate diverse client needs.
Maintaining professional boundaries.	Avoid conducting sessions from public or casual settings and reinforce professional virtual presence.
Storing and documenting telehealth sessions.	Follow HIPAA and state laws regarding recording, documentation, and storage of session notes.

Steps to Strengthen Ethical Telehealth Practices

Establish Clear Telehealth Policies:

- Ensure clients understand telehealth protocols and limitations.
- Obtain written informed consent before starting remote care.

Maintain High Standards for Privacy & Security:

- Use password-protected, encrypted platforms for virtual sessions.
- Educate clients on protecting their privacy (e.g., using secure Wi-Fi, avoiding public spaces).

Prepare for Emergencies & Crisis Management:

- Identify the client's emergency contacts and local resources.
- Develop a safety plan for high-risk clients receiving remote services.

Adhere to Licensing & Cross-Jurisdictional Regulations:

- Verify state licensing laws for telehealth services across state lines.
- Follow telehealth billing and reimbursement guidelines (Medicare, insurance policies).

Reflection

What additional safeguards can I implement for telehealth ethics?

How can I ensure ethical telehealth services for high-risk clients?

Are my current telehealth policies aligned with best practices and legal standards?
