

NOMC'S COVID-19 GUIDELINES: GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TELE-THERAPY APPOINTMENT



Janet E. Johnson, M.D., MPH

Our brains get sick just like other organs in the body. Mental illnesses and stress-related disorders are real and not a weakness or character defect. It is normal to feel distressed in such an abnormal time. Asking for help is a sign of strength.

In this time of social distancing and isolation, telemedicine is being used much more frequently, especially telepsychiatry. Whatever your particular case may be, seeking help can likely aid you with time management and stress reduction. Appointments via telemedicine (whether by a phone call or video-chat) are not new and have been utilized for some time now, enabling areas with limited resources to access services otherwise not available.

Get the most out of your sessions:



Be clear about what is causing you the most distress and why you are seeking help at this time. Prior to your appointment, it can be helpful to write down what your symptoms are/ what is bothering you/what has changed in your life that is causing the most trouble.



Think about what you want to achieve before you go to your session. What are your goals?



Ask questions! No question is stupid, and ask more than once if you need to. Write them down before your appointment. It is easy to forget them once you are in the appointment.



Be honest with your provider about your lifestyle and habits. They are not going to judge you for how much you are eating or drinking or not exercising, etc. But they need to know, or they will not be able to help you achieve the best results.



Set realistic expectations for yourself and your goals. Discuss your goals with your provider. One small step at a time is the way to go. Do not expect a magic happy pill or a cure in one hour of therapy.



Keep a notepad with you during the session to write things down if you need or want.

How teletherapy works:

1. Your provider will set up a specific time for your appointment and give you instructions as to how to log into the session. Different providers use different technologies.

Note: Zoom is commonly used for telehealth and has recently been in the media regarding privacy concerns. Generally, this is not an issue as providers use a more secure version of Zoom. If you have questions about the technology being used by your provider, ask them beforehand.

2. You will log into the session via your computer, tablet or phone. When you do so, you will see your provider in their office. You will usually also see yourself in a small screen to the side or to the top. Try not to get distracted by this.

3. Sit somewhere quiet where you will not have distractions or outside noises. Also try to sit somewhere where the background is not overly bright/dark or distracting. If you have a pet who may be a distraction, keep them in another room during your session.
4. The technology is generally excellent and you will be able to see and hear very well in real time. Occasionally there are slight glitches when things will freeze up, but this is typically infrequent and brief.
5. Ask your therapist if they can record the session so you can review it again before your next session.

Janet E Johnson. MD, MPH has been one of the NOMC's vital mental health advisors and providers since Hurricane Katrina when she founded a non-profit organization, "Project Rising Sun" to provide therapeutic drumming circles and mental health screenings for our musicians' community. As a psychiatric consultant for Mercy Corps, Dr. Johnson has worked in China and Haiti bringing mental health services to those amidst times of crisis.