

Date: September 13, 2023

Topic: Telehealth

Issue: Telehealth services have expanded and licensees have continued to request guidance regarding telehealth practices. This position statement is meant to offer guidance but does not replace legal advice for meeting state statutes and laws or insurance requirements.

Position Statement:

Marriage and Family Therapists are committed to upholding the AAMFT Code of Ethics. In particular, several AAMFT Codes of Ethics are applicable to the practice of telehealth. Marriage and family therapists are dedicated to meeting competency standards in the field as well as growing knowledge and competencies according to AAMFT Code of Ethics: 3.1 Maintenance of Competency, 3.6 Development of New Skills, and 7.3 Competence. Marriage and family therapists are committed to obtaining Informed Consent, 1.2. Marriage and family therapists adhere to Technology Assisted Services, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6.

Definition of service:

Telehealth is referred to in this document as the practice of exchanging information related to a client's health (mental/emotional/physical) from one site to another via electronic communication.

Recommendations:

- 1) Licensees providing telehealth as a marriage and family therapist in the state of North Carolina must hold a LMFT or LMFTA from the state of North Carolina or be practicing as an intern in an educational practicum site under the supervision of a AAMFT Approved Supervisor.
- 2) Licensees providing telehealth sessions in the state of North Carolina should familiarize themselves with the state laws and legislation that will guide their practice.
- 3) Licensees will include risks and benefits of telehealth practices in their informed consent documents and will review risks and benefits verbally prior to telehealth sessions commencing.
- 4) Licensees will review the client's current treatment plan and goals before each telehealth session to ensure telehealth is the best practice for the current plan. Licensees will recommend an in-person session or referral to another practitioner if teletherapy is not the best practice.
- 5) In case of emergency and to validate your client is physically located in a state in which you are licensed, licensees will verify current physical address for each client joining via telehealth. This address may be different than where the client resides. The exact present address/location is necessary in case emergency services need to be dispatched.
- 6) Licensee will verify identity of client(s) through license or other form of identity verification upon beginning therapy.

- 7) Telehealth platforms must use a HIPAA compliant platform to protect the identity and information of all participants.
- 8) Licensees will conduct telehealth sessions in a confidential setting.
- 9) If the client is not in a confidential setting, licensee will review risks and benefits of holding the session in the client's current location and verify acceptance of the risks and benefits before proceeding.
- 10) Licensees will not conduct telehealth sessions if the client or licensee is in a safety-adverse situation. These situations may include but are not limited to the following: while driving a vehicle, operating any type of moving apparatus, operating heavy machinery or performing any task that endangers the health and safety of self or others.
- 11) Licensees will be aware of reasonable emergency resources within the area where the client is physically located during a session. These include but are not limited to the following: the local emergency phone number (calling 911 from your location will not obtain emergency personnel in your client's location), domestic violence shelters, social services resources etc.
- 12) It is recommended that licensees read the free-to-members AAMFT publication, "Best Practices in the Online Practice of Couple and Family Therapy."
- 13) It is recommended that licensees who will use telehealth services within their practice should seek at least 3 CEUs before commencing with telehealth practice and, further, 3 CEUs per year on "telehealth best practices" in order to stay current on relevant topics and recommendations to the practice.

Resources:

"AAMFT: Best Practices in the Online Practice of Couple and Family Therapy" available free for members:

<https://www.aamft.org/store/detail.aspx?id=DLBPITOPCAFT>

AAMFT Code of Ethics:

https://www.aamft.org/Legal_Ethics/Code_of_Ethics.aspx

General North Carolina Statutes:

<https://www.ncleg.gov/Laws/GeneralStatutes>

Laws and Rules for MFTs in North Carolina:

<https://www.ncbmf.org/resources-and-information/professional-resources/statutes-and-rules>