

## Informed Consent for Telepsychology

This document contains important information on participating in psychological services over the telephone or Internet. It is a supplement to our Notice of Privacy Practices and Patient Services Agreement. Please read this document carefully and discuss any questions you might have with your therapist. When you sign this document, it will represent a formal agreement between you and RWPS.

### What is “Telepsychology” and what are its benefits?

Telepsychology refers to providing psychological services remotely using telecommunication technologies, such as video conferencing or telephone. In this form “telepsychology” also refers to teletherapy sessions provided by mental health counselor. The main benefit of telepsychology is that the provider can still serve the patient even if they are unable to meet in person (e.g., due to relocation, travel, quarantine, etc.). This can be helpful in ensuring continuity of care.

### What are the risks of Telepsychology?

In addition to these benefits, telepsychology does differ from in-person services in some important ways and carries with it some risks. For example:

- Risks to confidentiality. Because telepsychology sessions take place outside of the therapist’s private office, there is potential for other people to overhear sessions. As described in the Patient Services Agreement, we caution you against using a public access computer, connecting over nonsecure / public network, or using auto-fill for your username and password as others may be able to access your private information. We also urge you to consider any applicable employer policies related to use of work computers for personal communication. In light of the above, it is important to work together to minimize risks to your confidentiality. On our end, we will take reasonable steps to ensure your privacy such as only engaging in telepsychology sessions in a private place, and when conducting video sessions, only using encrypted, HIPAA-compliant software, and a secure network. In addition, we ask that you participate in telepsychology sessions only while in a private room or area where other people are not present, you will not be interrupted, and others cannot overhear the conversation. It is also important for you to ensure the security of your computer or other device and the network you are using. While these steps greatly reduce the risks to confidentiality, we cannot guarantee your privacy during telepsychology sessions.
- Technology glitches. There are many ways that technology glitches might impact telepsychology sessions. For example, calls can get dropped, Internet connections can become weak or get dropped altogether, software can freeze up or have other bugs, other people might gain access to our private conversation, or stored data could be accessed by unauthorized people or companies. We will do our best to mitigate these risks by using a reliable Internet or phone connection and secure software as described above. We ask that you do your best to make sure that you have a strong, reliable connection whether by phone or Internet. For Internet-based sessions, it is best to use a private connection (rather than a public network) and a device with proper security features enabled. It is also important for us to have an alternate way to reach each other if we experience a technology glitch or failure.
- Crisis management and intervention. It is difficult to provide adequate care in crisis situations via telepsychology. Therefore, we typically do not engage in telepsychology with patients who are currently in crisis or may require high levels of support and intervention. This is discussed further below in the section “Is Telepsychology an appropriate option for me?” In addition, we require that you have an up-to-date Emergency Response Plan on file that you and your therapist can use to address potential crisis situations

-CONFIDENTIAL-

that may arise during telepsychology work.

- **Efficacy.** Most research shows that telepsychology is about as effective as in-person psychotherapy. However, we believe that meeting in-person is the gold standard of our field and that something is lost by not being in the same room together. For example, not being physically present to each other in telepsychology may impair the therapist's ability to fully perceive and respond to important nonverbal cues in session. It can also make certain kinds of interventions more difficult. Lastly, some forms of psychological testing require meeting in-person.
- **Interruption of services.** Mental health professionals are only permitted to practice in states in which they hold a valid license to do so. If you and your provider are residing in different states, then we must be attentive to the legal requirements in both states. In some situations, we can obtain permission to provide telepsychology services across state lines (e.g., there is a state of emergency due to an epidemic, applying for and receiving a temporary permit, obtaining a standard license to practice in that state). However, if something changes regarding our licensure status or the legal rules we are obliged to follow (e.g., temporary permit expires, state of emergency ends, etc.), we may no longer be able to provide telepsychology services to you across state lines. If this occurs, we will talk with you about your options, such as in-person services, a referral to another provider, etc.

### **Is Telepsychology appropriate for me?**

Telepsychology is not for everyone. It is important that you and your therapist discuss the appropriateness of telepsychology sessions as a viable option in your particular case. There are a number of issues to consider: your reasons for seeking our services, the treatment plan developed with your therapist, your current level of functioning and the corresponding level of care needed to pursue your goals, your privacy, and your access to and confidence with telecommunications. Prior to initiating telepsychology sessions, your provider will evaluate these issues with you in a face-to-face meeting and determine whether telepsychology is a suitable option.

Following the start of telepsychology sessions, we will re-evaluate from time to time the appropriateness of proceeding in this way. We may request occasional in-person sessions to "check-in" with one another. It is possible that we may conclude that telepsychology is no longer the most appropriate form of care. If this happens, then we will discuss other options with you such as switching to in-person sessions or referral to other professionals who can provide appropriate services.

### **How do Telepsychology sessions work?**

If and when we agree to try some telepsychology sessions with you, scheduling appointments works the same as normal. You may schedule appointments by talking with your therapist or our administrative assistant in person or via phone, or you can schedule online using the Patient Portal. For phone sessions, your therapist will call you at the time of the appointment using the phone number you have specified. For video sessions, the therapist will send you a secure message via the Patient Portal with a link and information about how to log on to the video session. The link will be different for each session so it is important to be familiar with how to log in to the Patient Portal and retrieve this information easily prior to each session. Also, we ask that you give yourself a few extra minutes prior to session to connect. If you have any difficulty accessing the Patient Portal, please call our administrative assistant at 513-407-8878.

When you first log on the video session, you may see a "waiting room" screen. This is normal. The therapist will "admit" you to the session when ready. At the start of each session, the therapist will verify your identity, inquire about your location, and verify your privacy. We ask that you provide us a backup way to connect in case we get disconnected for some reason. In the case of video sessions, we ask that help us ensure we have an accurate phone number on file to which you have ready access in case we get disconnected. If we are conducting a phone session with you, and you are using your cell phone, we would ask that you have access to

*-CONFIDENTIAL-*

another phone / phone line in case your phone stops working (e.g., battery dies, etc.). If we lose our connection during either a phone or video session, the therapist will call you on whatever phone number we have on file to continue the session.

### **How do we communicate outside of session?**

As stated in our Patient Services Agreement, the best time to communicate with your therapist is in session. If you need to contact us outside of session, you are welcome to call our office at 513-407-8878. The front desk can handle a wide range of issues related to scheduling, billing, and related administrative tasks. If you have a question or issue that only your therapist can address, you may ask to speak with your therapist or select his/her extension from the menu. We ask that you keep these phone calls brief. We reserve the right to charge a portion of our regular fee for phone calls that exceed 15 minutes. If we are unavailable to take your call, you are welcome to leave a voicemail. If you leave a valid phone number, we will return your call as soon as possible. If we are unable to reach you when returning your call, we will leave a message unless you instruct us not to.

You may also send your therapist a secure electronic message through the Patient Portal. However, please be advised that your therapist may not be able to respond immediately. Also, be aware that these messages become a permanent part of your clinical record. Please be brief and discrete.

Please note that we do not use regular email, text messaging, or other apps to communicate with patients. Similarly, we do not connect with patients using any social media or networking apps or websites. We ask that you do not attempt to communicate with us in these ways. We will not respond to requests to connect through these media.

### **How do you handle emergencies while doing Telepsychology?**

An Emergency Response Plan is part of our Patient Services Agreement. When considering telepsychology services, your therapist will review this plan with you to make sure that it is up-to-date and appropriate for the use of telepsychology. In particular, your therapist will work with you to make sure you are aware of local support services (e.g., a local crisis hotline, local providers, hospital, etc.) and that we have current Emergency Contacts on file.

**\*\*Please keep in mind that often the best response to a clinical emergency is for you to dial 911.\*\***

### **What about confidentiality and clinical records?**

As described in our Notice of Privacy Practices and Patient Services Agreement, we have a legal and ethical responsibility to do our best to protect your confidentiality. This includes all communications that are a part of telepsychology sessions. However, the nature of electronic communications technologies is such that we cannot guarantee that our communications will be kept confidential or that other people may not gain access to our communications. As noted above, we will only engage in telepsychology in private locations and use only HIPAA-compliant, encrypted software for video sessions. We will also do our best to protect our devices (e.g., by using security software and secure Internet connections). We ask that you also take reasonable steps to ensure the security of our communications (e.g., using secure networks, password protecting your devices, having up-to-date security software, etc.).

We will not record our telepsychology sessions with you in any way without discussing it with you first and getting your explicit permission. Similarly, we ask that you do not record our telepsychology sessions in any way without first discussing it with us and gaining our permission.

I will not record my telepsychology sessions in any way unless my RWPS therapist gives me explicit permission to do so. \_\_\_\_\_

*Initials*

~~-CONFIDENTIAL-~~

We will maintain clinical records regarding our telepsychology sessions as we do for all of our clinical services. How we handle these records is discussed in our Notice of Privacy Practices. As noted in those documents, RWPS uses a cloud-based practice management system, which maintains our clinical records electronically. The company that provides this service is HIPAA compliant and reliably maintains the integrity and security of the clinical records. We will work with our software company to ensure that your records will be securely maintained for at least the duration required by law.

**What are the fees for Telepsychology sessions?**

RWPS uses the same clinical fees for telepsychology as for in-person psychological services. These fees and related financial policies are outlined in our Patient Services Agreement. While we do not participate in insurance plans nor bill insurance companies, some of our patients submit claims to their insurance companies independently. If you plan to do this, please note that some insurance companies may not cover telepsychology sessions. Regardless, you are responsible for the applicable fee at the time of service, unless other arrangements have been made with us.

**Informed Consent**

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received and read the RWPS “Informed Consent for Telepsychology.” My signature further signifies that I freely giving my informed consent to enter to the terms described herein. I understand that I can revoke this consent in writing at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print Patient Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Patient or Parent/Legal Guardian)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Relationship to Patient)

*-CONFIDENTIAL-*