2.5: Teletherapy and Telehealth

**Telehealth** is the use of digital technologies to deliver medical care, health education, and public health services by remotely connecting multiple users in separate locations. Nurses must be aware of potential barriers affecting client use of telehealth (such as lack of Internet access or lack of support for individuals learning new technologies), as well as state and federal policies regarding telehealth and their nursing license across state lines.

Read more about telehealth licensing requirements and interstate compacts at the [Telehealth.hss.gov webpage](https://telehealth.hss.gov).

**Teletherapy** is mental health counseling over the phone or online with videoconferencing. COVID-19 has led to reduced access to medical and mental health care, so delivering behavioral health care via telehealth is one way to address this issue. When using teletherapy, nurses should treat clients as if they are sitting across from them and focus on eye contact and empathetic expressions to build a connection, just during a face-to-face encounter.[1]

Group therapy can be accomplished via telehealth. Connecting clients through telehealth creates a group dynamic that can build community, reduce feelings of isolation, and offer new perspectives. Group therapy via telehealth can create a sense of belonging and build a trusted support system.

Here are a few guidelines for group therapy telehealth sessions[2]:

- **Prescreen group members**: Group members may have various needs, experiences, or personalities. It is helpful to screen each potential client to ensure every member can benefit from group therapy and that their needs match the goals of the group.
- **Require completion of online consent forms**: Group telehealth sessions involve multiple people and are conducted outside of a controlled setting like an office. Client consent forms should be required and available online. The consent forms should outline any associated risks, benefits, and limits to confidentiality.
- **Develop group guidelines**: Make clear ground rules covering what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.
Some common ground rules include requiring all participants to have their camera on, attend from a room where they can be alone during the session, and use the digital "raise hand" feature (or raise their hand) when they want to speak. Prohibiting recording of the session is a common ground rule to protect confidentiality. Address logistical topics like how many missed sessions are allowed and how to contact the group leader(s).

- **Select your settings and technology:** Choose the telehealth video platform that best suits your needs for encryption and privacy, user controls, and more. Go through all of the settings ahead of time to select the options that provide the highest level of privacy. Think about what will help you and the group communicate effectively such as screen sharing options or a virtual whiteboard.

- **Be engaging:** When you are on screen instead of in person, it is even more important to be conscious of the group dynamic and take steps to keep group members interested, energized, and engaged. Start with introductions and greetings using first names only for privacy. Make eye contact with group members by looking into the camera and use body language and hand gestures to help express your ideas. Build in moments for clients to interact and contribute to the conversation, such as breakout rooms or paired discussions.
