GUIDELINES FOR USING ONLINE THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION

PRACTITIONERS

KEY MESSAGES

Practitioners skilfully adapted their communication from in-person to online during pandemic restrictions

A well-managed online connection can be as effective as an in-person meeting: clients value these personal connections, especially at times of restriction

Most practitioners rapidly gained skills and confidence despite initial concerns about online meeting

GUIDELINES FOR PRACTITIONERS

PLANNING

Consider the most appropriate communication technology for the purpose of the meeting, e.g. when getting to know the client, client preferences and best interests e.g. phone call, videocall, text or other messaging services

Risk assessments for online meeting need particular care for some conditions, e.g. paranoia, anxiety

Plan for dealing with technical difficulties or unexpected disconnection; how will you reconnect? Aim to become comfortable with small disruptions

An initial in-person meeting can work well. It can take longer to build rapport with clients online: consider online getting-to-know-you sessions

Online meetings often take longer to cover the same material than in-person ones and can feel more tiring

- Consider something playful to get interaction started and plan to cover less in one meeting; consider more frequent shorter sessions

- Look after yourself first: breaks away from screen, full body movement, seek support from supervisor or colleagues

GROUND RULES

Agree with client how to use online meetings: opportunity for greater engagement

Agree ground rules e.g. suitable clothing, presence of others (visual or audio)

Aim to have other tasks hidden or on silent (on the screen or other devices)

Be explicit about off-screen behaviour, e.g. if you are hand-writing notes and need to look away

Consider what each side is comfortable to see, seeing each other can help communication but some clients may start by hiding self-view

Safeguarding: have a routine plan for disrupted meetings, e.g. having phone numbers

STRATEGIES

Consider how to respond if a client has tuned out

Expressing emotion: it is harder to transmit empathy for sadness but easier to be detached from anger: consider using words more to name what you see, feel and hear, and checking how the call is working

It may help to exaggerate nonverbal cues, to wait and to slow down: it is useful to become comfortable with pausing and silence

Consider using objects to share attention: not just each other's faces, but external referents such as photos or video, drawing or showing and talking about an object, slide-sharing, shared document editing, e.g. software whiteboard functions

Observe how clients can show high adaptability to online communication, e.g. young children often quickly understand how to share attention to objects