

Amendment to the Ethics Code to include Telepsychology Guidelines

The guidelines described in Section 11.00 as Guidelines in Telepsychology practice in Jamaica as legally permitted; refers to an emerging area of practice being developed in lieu of or in addition to physical/ in-person therapy.

Telepsychology is defined as the provision of psychological services using telecommunication technologies (including, but not limited to telephone, mobile devices, interactive videoconferencing, e-mail, online chat, and text).

Telepsychology is now being practiced more frequently in Jamaica to provide mental health services, and supervisory services as a convenient mode particularly since the inception of the COVID-19 imposed social distancing measures.

Against this background, the JamPsych Executive committee has seen the urgent need to make an amendment to the Ethical Code by including section 11.00 on Ethical Guidelines in Telepsychology. This section will as much as possible address potential ethical issues in telepsychology. ***Guidelines for tele-psychology do not supersede the general established ethical guidelines of the profession.***

11.00 Guidelines in Telepsychology

11:01 Clinicians' Competencies

As a primary ethical obligation (*See Standard 2. Competence*), psychologists, counsellors /mental health practitioners providing telepsychology services assume the responsibility to acquire the requisite professional training, knowledge and skills to ensure their clinical and technical competence with both the technologies used and the possible impact that the technologies may have on clients, supervisees, clinicians or other professionals.

Additionally, practitioners must consider their clients' ability to engage in and fully understand the risks and benefits of the proposed interventions utilizing specific technologies. Efforts must be made to understand the role of the clients' socioeconomic factors, psychiatric ability, medical status, physical/cognitive disability, etc.) which may impact effective use of telecommunication technologies in service delivery.

11.02 Confidentiality

It is of utmost importance that when providing telepsychology services, efforts are made to protect clients' confidentiality (*see Ethical Standard 4. Privacy and Confidentiality*). As such, psychologists, counsellors /mental health practitioners who provide telepsychology services must ensure that they learn about possible

risks to confidentiality associated with the particular technology being used and make reasonable efforts to protect and maintain the confidentiality of the information relating to their clients.

Clients should be informed of the limits to confidentiality (inherent to the use of many telecommunication methods) and the possible risks of access to, or disclosure of confidential information that may occur during service delivery, to include the risks of others gaining access to electronic communications (telephone, e-mail) between the clinician and the client.

Potential risks to be considered may include but not limited to the following:

- 1) confidentiality may not be fully guaranteed when using telecommunication technologies
- 2) use of search engines and participation in social networking sites
- 3) protecting confidential information from inappropriate breaches
- 4) boundary issues that may arise from the use of social media networks
- 5) ethical and practical implications of unauthorized persons proactively researching personal information about clients online.

11.03 Boundaries

Psychologists, counsellors /mental health practitioners who provide telepsychology services ensure that appropriate boundaries are set and maintained. The boundaries for telepsychology are identical to those offered during in-person care and other types of non-therapy interventions as the same code of professionalism applies (*See Guideline-Principle B: Fidelity and Responsibility*)

Furthermore, clinicians are expected to uphold the standards of professionalism when conducting video conferencing sessions from home to include: dressing appropriately, maintaining scheduled appointments and adhering to the professional role.

11.04 Informed Consent

In an effort to present a clear description of the telepsychology services to be provided, psychologists, counsellors/mental health practitioners strive to obtain and document informed consent that specifically addresses the unique concerns related to the telepsychology services they provide. When doing so, practitioners are cognizant of the laws and regulations that apply, as well as the institutional requirements that govern informed consent in telepsychology. This

information should include the policies and procedures that explain the manner of interaction using the particular telecommunication technologies involved.

Before providing telepsychology services, it is imperative that therapists obtain and document informed consent from their clients that specifically addresses the unique concerns (i.e. the manner in which the practitioners and the clients will use the particular telecommunication technologies, the boundaries they will establish and observe, and the procedures for responding to electronic communication from clients) relevant to those services that will be offered by using language that is reasonably clear to clients. (*See Standard 10.01 (b) Informed Consent to Therapy*).

Potential limitations to privacy and confidentiality inherent to the use of technology should be clearly outlined and practitioners provide their clients with adequate information of the steps taken to safeguard any potential risks. Practitioners must give consideration to obtaining informed consent from providing telepsychology services with a minor and document these steps clearly.

11.05 Disposal of Data and Information and Technologies

In order to maximally preserve client confidentiality and privacy, appropriate disposal methods must be utilized. Therefore, psychologists, counsellors /mental health practitioners who provide telepsychology services make reasonable efforts to ensure full and complete disposal of electronic data and information. As such, policies and procedures must be in place for the secure destruction of data and information to preserve client confidentiality and privacy. Methods and procedures used when disposing of the data and information must be documented (*See Standards 6.01 & 6.02- Record Keeping and Fees*).

11.06 Standards of Care

Psychologists, counsellors/ mental health service providers must ensure that the ethical and professional standard of care that obtains in conventional practice is upheld. Practitioners make every effort to ensure that ethical and professional standards of care and practice are outlined and met from the inception and continue throughout the duration of the telepsychology services being provided. This will determine if the modality of service is appropriate, efficacious, and safe.

Psychologists, counsellors/ mental health service providers are encouraged to carefully examine the unique benefits of delivering telepsychology services (e.g., access to care, access to consulting services, client convenience, accommodating client special needs, etc.) relative to the unique risks (e.g., information security, emergency management, etc.) when determining whether

or not to offer telepsychology services. Other factors include geographic location, organizational culture, technological competence (both that of the practitioner and that of the client), and, as appropriate, medical conditions, mental status and stability, psychiatric diagnosis, current or historic use of substances, treatment history, and therapeutic needs that may be relevant to assessing the appropriateness of the telepsychology services being offered.

11.07 Security measures in data/ information transmission

There are potential threats to the security and transmission of clients' information when using telecommunication technologies. Therefore, psychologists, counsellors, mental health service providers who provide telepsychology services take reasonable steps to ensure that security measures are implemented to protect clients' information from unintended disclosure or access. Keen attention must be given to potential threats to security and transmission which may include: policies and practices of technology companies and vendors, computer viruses, security systems failure, flawed software, hackers, theft of technology devices, damage to hard drives or portable drives, ease of accessibility to unsecured electronic files, and malfunctioning or outdated technology.

Psychologists, counsellors, mental health service providers must document the security measures to protect client data and information from unintended access or disclosure, clearly address what types of telecommunication technologies are used (e.g., e-mail, telephone, video teleconferencing, text), how they are used, and whether the telepsychology services used are the primary method of contact or augment in-person contact. When keeping records of e-mail, online messaging, and other work using telecommunication technologies, preserving the actual communication may be preferable to summarization in some cases depending on the type of technology used.

11.08 Inter-Caribbean Practice

Psychologists are encouraged to be familiar with and comply with all relevant laws and regulations when providing telepsychology services to clients across Caribbean or international borders. Clinicians must be aware of the provisions stipulated within the scope of practice to conduct telepsychology within the region or how to proceed with particular service provisions. Ensure that guidelines are followed in instances where a practitioner or client is temporarily out of Jamaica or has split residences across two countries, and the practitioner needs to offer services across borders. Practitioners are therefore required to be knowledgeable about the services, laws and regulations governing telepsychology in each jurisdiction, and review the relevant professional licensure requirements.

11.09 Testing and assessments

When providing telepsychology, psychologists/counsellors are encouraged to consider the unique issues that may arise with test instruments and assessment approaches designed for in-person implementation. When undertaking tele-assessments, psychologists and counsellors are ethically bound to develop the requisite awareness in this area.

In that regard, psychologists/counsellors are encouraged to ensure that the integrity of the psychometric properties of the test or assessment procedure (e.g., reliability and validity) and the conditions of administration indicated in the test manual are preserved when adapted for use with such technologies. In addition, consider if modifications to the testing environment or conditions are necessary to accomplish this preservation.

11.10 Continuing Education

If a practitioner opts to practice telepsychology, in keeping with Code 2.01 and 2.03 they are responsible for ensuring they obtain and make efforts to enhance, the requisite knowledge and understanding of delivering psychological services using technology.

11.11 Clinical Supervision

Psychologists/counsellors should make reasonable efforts to continue to provide and establish a timely and specific process for students and supervisees (see Standard 7.06). All guidelines as they pertain to clinical supervision remain as outlined in Section 5.0 in the JamPsych Scope of Practice.

Practitioners are expected to make the relevant adaptations to use of telecommunication means to ensure the supervisee obtains the requisite competencies and experiences. In keeping with Standard 11.01, psychologists/counsellors are expected to obtain any additional knowledge and skills that may be beneficial to ensuring effective supervision via this modality.

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