

Services Available during COVID19 Pandemic

As many of you are now aware, we have made the difficult decision to move the practice from face-to-face sessions to telehealth and phone services. This decision has been made for safety reasons for both you as clients but also for us and our families, and the wider community in reducing the need for travel and gathering in the shared waiting area of our office space. It is likely that we will continue to see changes in how we receive our health care, both physical and mental and the move to practice using telehealth and phone services will allow us to continue to work with you over the duration of the pandemic and restrictions placed upon our movement within society.

Fortunately, the Australian Government are in support of this and have provided MBS item numbers so that this is possible. Whilst initially only available to clients who were at increased risk, or who were isolating with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID19 recent changes have meant that health professionals who are also at increased risk can offer services to all their clients using these same numbers.

The Medicare services are currently only available to be used if we are bulk billing our clients, which does increase the financial pressure on our service given our office expenses have not changed. At this time our services will be bulk billed provided you have an existing mental health care plan from your GP and you have sessions available to use.

In addition to Medicare, some Private Health Insurers have also made it possible to claim for services you received by Clinical Psychologists over telehealth or phone during this time period. For those of you who are using your Private Health Insurance I encourage you to contact your provider and ask them if they are allowing this and what your limits are.

If you are already in a rural or remote area and have been engaging in telehealth services then there is no change required for the services to continue.

It is likely that it will take us all some time to get used to the changes that are required both in our appointments and also in the wider community. We will work through these together during our sessions and we will also try and make available to you on the website additional materials that might be useful at this time so please remember to check on their for resources and information. In order to answer some of the questions about what to do now in terms of our appointments we have prepared some questions and answers below which you might find helpful.

What type of appointments are available?

Telehealth appointments are those that we use computers or smart devices for that allow us to use both audio and visual to interact. The types of appointments we can offer you include:

Skype – You will need to create an account with Skype and then connect with your therapist's skype account. When you have your appointment, the therapist will ring you from skype when your appointment starts. Whilst your appointment may be on the hour, give your therapist a little time to connect as they are likely switching between different modes of contact and this could take a little time. During the Skype appointment the therapist will be able to share files with you if you are working on any worksheets or there is a useful resource, they want to work with you on. There is also a chat section for you to use text to communicate if need be. If you use Skype it is likely it will only be the audio and video, you will need to use so don't worry if you are feeling a little overwhelmed right now. The therapist is well versed in using this type of communication tool and will guide you through it.

Zoom – You need only click on a link provided in an e-mail to you. You do not need to have a zoom account as the link will just open the room for you using whatever internet browser you have. The therapist has a zoom account, which is a little like a meeting room and they create the appointment time and embed a unique code into the link they send you so that only you and them are present in the meeting room. Within this meeting space you and the therapist will also have the use of a whiteboard just like in the office space at Regent Street. Like Skype there is also a chat column for text chat but again it's unlikely you will use it.

Face-time – This is just like a phone call and you can with the camera used to transmit the visual image. This is only available if you have an apple device, unlike Skype and Zoom which will work across a variety of devices.

Phone – This is just what is says. Your therapist will call you at the time of your appointment on whatever phone you receive your reminder messages on. If you want a different number called for your appointment then now is a good time to either call and let us know the number or e-mail us at admin@wholepsychology.com.au

What will I need for these appointments?

If you are using a telehealth appointment then you will need a device, like a home computer (PC or Mac), laptop, tablet, or smart phone. Whatever device you decide to use should have connection to the internet, an internet browser installed for use, a camera if you intend on using the camera to enable a visual connection to your therapist, and sound capabilities. Whilst you are welcome to use the speakers on your computer, we recommend

using a headset or earphones so that there is additional privacy and the sound quality is often better.

How do I elect what type of appointment I would like?

You will need to let us know before your appointment what type of appointment (telehealth or phone) and what platform (Skype, zoom, face time) you would like to use. You can do this by either calling us on 1300923927 or by e-mail admin@wholepsychology.com.au

Once you have told us the first time what your preference is you do not need to keep letting us know each time. At the end of your first appointment your therapist will confirm with you your ongoing preference ready for your next appointment.

If I try telehealth and it doesn't work for me, can I change to phone?

Absolutely. You can also change between the different platforms within telehealth and trial them until you find what works best for you. We recommend not changing mid appointment though as it interrupts the flow of therapy.

What if I have technical difficulties using telehealth?

If you are having trouble using telehealth then your therapist will try and trouble shoot the problem if it is an easy fix but if it takes longer than five minutes they will abandon the telehealth and call you on the phone. Whilst the preference is to be able to use telehealth, the greater preference is that you get your whole appointment time with your therapist.

Most problems can be worked out quickly and usually after the first session things run smoothly. Of course, there is a large strain on the NBN network and phone networks as we are all moving to rely on them more for health and non-health related meetings.

How will my clinician look after my privacy if we are using telehealth or phone appointments?

The same privacy concerns and policies apply online. The above mentioned, telehealth options have all been researched as being secure connections between the two parties only and the connection does not go through a third party. Just like in the office space your therapist is ensuring that the sound travelling is minimised using music outside the therapy space. A headset is also used so that sound from you, your voice, is not played aloud into the room. If you are using the phone the therapist *will not* be using the speaker phone for appointments.

There is no change to your client file and notes during this change of service.

Where should I be when we are having the appointments?

It is ideal that you be in a secure room in your house when you are having the appointments. Please do not use an open space where other people in your house may enter. If your computer or device is stationary, then ask others who share the space to create privacy for you by leaving the space. If you can not find a secure place at home, then in a parked stationary car could be a suitable alternative. Clients in the past have also gone walking using their headphones and sticking to quieter areas. If you are choosing this option, then please be mindful of social distancing and the NSW guidelines issued around leaving your house.

How can I create a safe space?

It is important to spend a little time before the appointment setting up your space. If you are living alone then you might feel like this doesn't apply to you but taking the time to pour a glass of water, making sure tissues are in a nearby location and making sure you have a comfortable seat are all part of creating a safe space as well.

We recommend if you are sharing the space with someone else then putting a Do Not Disturb Sign on your door or telling those you live with you are in a meeting. You don't necessarily have to disclose what the meeting is but that it is important you are not disturbed. Remember that telehealth is being used for a range of things during the pandemic including GP appointments, bank meetings, study groups, social hangouts as well as therapy sessions.

Sound barriers can also help protect you so play some music right near your door to muffle any sounds escaping your room. Make sure you are not playing it from the same device you are using for the session though or the therapist will not be able to hear you over the music. You could also roll up a towel and place it underneath your door to prevent sound travelling out. Of course, using a headset will also help reduce the sound.

Finally, remember therapy can be challenging and difficult at times and after therapy we are often a little raw. Be sure to create time and space for you to transition back into your day after the session ends. You might not be able to do what you normally do to achieve this, like go for a walk, or just the act of driving home, or wandering around a shopping centre, so you will need to create other ways to achieve this. You might try listening to some music, doing a puzzle, colouring-in or drawing, or another task that isn't too cognitively or emotionally challenging. This is a time to be gentle and kind to yourself, don't try and socialise to soon, or jump back into work or study.

There might be more questions that you have, or that come up along the way and we will add to this document as we navigate this together. If you have a question, we haven't answered here then please feel free to e-mail it to us and we will try and answer it as best we can.