

Tips for Parents of Patients Diagnosed with Neurodevelopmental Disorders to Make the Most out of a Telepsychiatry Session

Telepsychiatry can be a safe and cost-effective way to deliver psychiatric services for individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDD) such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or intellectual disability (ID). These patients may be more comfortable and secure doing a virtual appointment from the familiarity of their home.

Before the appointment:

- **We want your child to be present even if they don't interact by video chat.** We want to see our patient! Even if they do not interact with us, as long as they are in view of the camera, we can still see them gesture, make facial expressions, and interact with you or other household members. This can help us understand their mood and behaviors.
- **Make sure your child will be able to communicate easily.** If your child needs an assistive device to communicate, please charge it and keep it nearby for use during appointment. If they will need an interpreter, please let us know so that we can arrange for one to join the appointment.

Help us get to know your child better by answering some questions for your clinician in advance:

- **Has the patient participated in telepsychiatry visits before?** How did it go? If they are independent, do you think they can safely be left alone to speak with the clinician?
- **Does the patient have any sensory sensitivities that might affect the session?** How can we manage them? Are there favorite sensory activities or games that may engage the patient?
- **Does the patient have a history of unsafe or aggressive behaviors?** How do you usually manage these behaviors? Let us know of triggers or signs that may indicate the patient needs to take a break or end the session so we can keep our patient and his/her family safe.
- **Who else works with you and your family?** The best care for our patients is collaborative and includes multiple specialists, including therapists, behaviorists, or other physicians. If we know about other providers in advance, we can, if possible, try to be present on the same call with you to minimize your virtual visits.

Assessment and treatment happens in baby steps and may require several visits as we get to know you and your child.

Pre-Appointment Checklist For The Family

- **Have an appointment buddy available during the call.** An extra person can help with technical issues or keep the patient engaged in safe activities, while you speak with the clinician. The appointment buddy can also interact with the patient while you film the interactions, which helps us see how the patient is progressing. For the first appointment, make sure the legal guardian is available to provide consent.
- **Location, location, location!** Choose a location with good lighting and comfortable seating (not in bed). Privacy is also important for our patients, and having a quiet, private space (if the patient can be left unsupervised) or headphones available can give added confidentiality to our sessions, for both caregivers and patients.
- **Keep to your usual routine.** Patients should be awake, toileted, fed, and given their usual medications before the appointment. Have any “take as needed” medicines available to potentially use during the appointment.
- **Have the following items on hand:**
 - The patient’s list of current and past medication so we can review them during the appointment.
 - Have calming or sensory soothing objects at hand (e.g., preferred objects, weighted blankets, or vests) to help the patient remain calm during the appointment.
 - Assistive communication device ready for use.
 - List of questions and concerns for us. Jot these down before our appointment to prepare for the session.
 - A scale (to check the patient’s weight) and a blood pressure cuff (to monitor blood pressure), if available.