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# Telepsychiatry Etiquette Tips

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## ***Before the encounter***

Strive to use a location for telepsychiatry sessions that will mimic the “look and feel” of an office.

Consider the background that will be captured by the camera.

- Personal photos and other items you would not display in your office should be relocated out of the camera’s view.
- You may need to remove books from the camera’s view. (Your copy of *Fifty Shades of Grey* or similar titles on the bookshelf behind you may create a distraction for patients.)

Consider the framing of the camera shot – both your and the patient’s.

- The patient’s view of you should be similar to that of a seated news anchor on television.
- What else will you need to see? A patient’s gait? A play session?
  - If your camera does not have pan-tilt-zoom capability, consider having an additional camera set up to capture these.

Take note of where the camera is on your computer. If you focus exclusively on the patient’s image, it may appear to the patient that you are looking away from him or her.

- Placing the screen with the patient’s image just below the camera that is aimed at you can help mimic the effect of eye contact with the patient.

Consider the comfort of all participants. Patients should be able to interact with you without having to assume uncomfortable positions to be seen or make eye contact.

- Suggest that patient’s use a comfortable chair or sitting area and a comfortable play area for child patients.
- Likewise, you should be comfortable. You may be sitting in the same chair all day.

Clothing choices:

- Clothing should be comfortable, but generally appropriate for an in-person visit with the patient.
- Avoid busy patterns and textures. Corduroy, for example, can create a shimmering effect on the patient’s screen which can be distracting.

Avoid backlighting. This will create a shadow on your face.

The chosen location should be as free as possible from distracting noises.

- Test the noise level of the room in a practice session.
- Sometimes unnoticeable noises, such as the air conditioner running, can be amplified by microphones.
- Others in the area may need to be asked to keep the noise level down.
- Silence all phones and other devices prior to starting a session.

Privacy should be afforded by the location.

- Family members, pets, and others may need to remain clear of the area.
- Sessions should be conducted behind closed doors.

Practice makes perfect.

- Conduct practice sessions with others before real sessions.
- Allow time for patients to practice and become comfortable with the equipment, especially if patients will be expected to manipulate the equipment during the session.

Mute your microphone until the session starts.

### ***During the encounter***

Remember to un-mute your microphone.

Introduce everyone who will be participating in the session.

Remember to obtain the consent of the patient for the individual session.

Avoid shuffling papers, clicking pens, tapping tables and other habits as these may be amplified by your microphone.

If you incorporate text messaging, email, or instant messaging into the encounter, do not type in all capital letters. That is considered yelling.

Encourage questions about the equipment and how sessions will be conducted.

- “Do you have any questions” can seem off-putting. “What questions do you have” implies the patient ought to have questions.

### ***After the encounter***

Note any follow-up appointments with the patient.

To help the next session go smoothly, address any technical issues encountered during the instant session right away.

Remember to turn off your equipment, close your telepsychiatry platform, or at least mute your microphone after a session concludes.

- At least one doctor has faced a complaint when a patient heard a post-session conversation over an open microphone and did not like what he heard.

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