

COVID-19 Guidelines for QTPoC Mental Health Practitioners

Our Role at this time

Queer and trans people of color providing mental health support are an essential part of community-led responses to COVID-19. Our communities have long been most vulnerable to inequities and COVID-19 will be no different. Lack of access to healthcare, poverty, criminalization, the medical industrial complex, and violence, specifically against Asian people, are exacerbated by this crisis and put our collective survival in jeopardy. QTPoC mental health practitioners are charged with tending to the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of our communities. Yet this time calls us to embody a new level of leadership.

**We are meaning-makers, spiritual stewards,
and tenders of collective grief.**

Our community is seeking safety and space to make sense of an intense time of uncertainty, loss, fear, and change. What we are living through is unprecedented and terrifying. We have a responsibility to provide support, organize systems of care, and respond to this moment with courage, grace, the resources we can offer.

Telemental Health as Social Solidarity



[Image Description: A blue background with a pattern of delicate line-drawings of plants, overlaid with orange blocks with blue text that reads: "Social Distancing is Disability Justice." Art by Rafi Darrow.]

Many of us are "sheltering in place", and face the challenge of transitioning all of our therapeutic work to virtual spaces. Normally, telemental health is not recommended as a medium to offer support during crisis. In order to protect our community, which has a significant number of chronically ill, sick and disabled folks, we must make this transition quickly and figure out new strategies to provide care to address the stress, fear, and panic we are experiencing due to the pandemic.

What can we do?

We must recognize that there is no more business as usual if we want to survive this crisis together.

We must:

- **Practice social solidarity by engaging in physical distancing.** Even if your state or city has not instituted a "shelter in place" order, it's not too early to consider transitioning to telemental health (if possible) or modifying your work in other ways to reduce risk for COVID-19. Many of our communities are at high risk for coronavirus due to having a disproportionate rate of pre-existing conditions.
- **Acknowledge your own fear and panic.** Find space to address your own fears and realities around losing income and changes to your working conditions. Specifically, acknowledge and attend to your concerns about transitioning to virtual platforms.
- **Reach out for support from other practitioners, professional organizations, etc.** You do not have to do this alone. Many of us have made the transition to telemental health and can share tips and strategies to get you started.
- **Accept that we are operating during a crisis that we've never experienced before.** Although there is some guidance about how to provide telemental health, we need to collectively address issues for which we do not have guidance, such as privacy, continuation of care, etc. during a pandemic.
- **Engage our creativity and innovation.** This time of change is calling on us to think outside of the boxes we've been given from our field. Together, we can make sure our community has access to care, safety, and support.
- **Support your clients to come to terms with these changes.** Many of our folks are losing income, getting sick and/or "sheltering in place" in unsafe and unsupportive environments. Meeting virtually may not be ideal and could bring up even more loss for those we serve.

Resources

<u>Coronavirus: AAMFT Status</u>	<u>Telepsychology</u>
<u>Counseling in a Time of Covid-19</u>	<u>APA Coronavirus Resources</u>
<u>Getting Started with Telehealth</u>	<u>Coronavirus (COVID-19): NASW</u>
<u>Telehealth Information And Counselors In Health Care</u>	<u>Summary of Changes to the Telemental Health</u>
<u>Working With Your Clients</u>	<u>Informed consent when offering telepsychological services</u>
<u>Best Practices in the Online Practice of Couple and Family Therapy</u>	<u>BBS statement on HHS Telehealth Announcement (For practitioners in CA)</u>