



Building Professional Excellence

Webinar Follow-Up Q&A with Dr. Michael Jones, PhD, LPC-S, NCC, BC-TMH

Navigating Ethics and Crisis Management in Telemental Health

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Q1: Are there any HIPAA compliance games for Telehealth children and adolescents?

– D. Lopez

A:

There are currently no widely recognized HIPAA compliance games designed specifically for youth in telemental health. However, some clinicians create interactive experiences like Google Slides board games, choose-your-path stories, or role-play scenarios, to teach digital privacy in a child-friendly way. These can be framed around safe communication, personal boundaries online, and how to protect private information. As noted in the webinar, ethical practice includes teaching clients about confidentiality using age-appropriate methods (Ashcroft et al., 2021; Valenzuela et al., 2020).

Q2: What encryption programs are recommended for communicating with parents/school counselors over email?

– A. Correa

A:

You're right to prioritize security. While encrypting PDFs with Adobe is a good step, secure email platforms designed for healthcare are better suited for consistent HIPAA compliance. Programs like **Hushmail for Healthcare**, **Paubox**, or **ProtonMail (with HIPAA add-ons)** offer full email encryption and support BAAs. As discussed in the presentation (Adams & Leslie, 2022), HIPAA compliance in communication isn't just about encryption; it requires appropriate documentation, signed consent for electronic communications, and use of vendors that meet HIPAA security standards.



Q3: Could you give specific examples of de-escalation skills in virtual sessions?

– C. Reiche

A:

Yes, de-escalation in telemental health often hinges on preparation, presence, and adaptability. Here are several strategies:

- **Verbal Grounding Techniques:** Ask the client to name five things they can see, four they can touch, three they can hear, etc. This sensory redirection is especially helpful for clients experiencing anxiety, dissociation, or agitation.
- **Nonverbal Regulation:** Speak more slowly and calmly than usual. Reduce background noise, soften your tone, and maintain steady eye contact (through the camera, not the screen). These cues can mirror calm and promote co-regulation.
- **Crisis Safety Anchors:** Reference previously established safety plans or safe-person contact lists. Reinforce that you are activating a shared plan, not acting unilaterally.
- **Collaborative De-escalation:** Invite the client into shared responsibility: “What would help you feel safer right now?” or “Is there someone nearby who can sit with you for a few minutes?” This gives the client a sense of control, which can reduce panic.
- **Use of the Physical Environment:** Encourage them to move to a quieter room, dim the lights, or even change posture. Simple shifts in environment can support emotional regulation.

These methods reflect best practices outlined by Békés et al. (2021) and Wilks et al. (2019), emphasizing attunement, steady pacing, and the preemptive use of relational rapport.

Q4: Are there models clinicians should follow in tele-counseling practice?

– N. Talwar

A:

Yes, and being grounded in established models is key to delivering ethical and effective care in virtual environments. Here are several you should be aware of:

- **BC-TMH Credential (Board Certified – Telemental Health Provider):** This credential offers clinicians a structured way to demonstrate specialized training in



legal, ethical, technological, and clinical dimensions of telemental health. It covers topics such as client safety planning, informed consent for virtual care, and cultural considerations across digital platforms. Holding the BC-TMH credential signals to clients, supervisors, and licensing boards that you've completed a verified, content-rich training program.

- **SAMHSA's Telehealth Implementation Model:** This model focuses on three phases—preparation, service delivery, and maintenance. It encourages clinicians to plan for technological needs, obtain consent, monitor outcomes, and incorporate client feedback regularly.
- **Three Domains of Competence Framework:** This model underscores the importance of balanced development across:
 1. **Clinical Competence** – adapting counseling skills for virtual formats;
 2. **Technological Competence** – ensuring familiarity with secure platforms, devices, and digital communication tools;
 3. **Ethical and Legal Awareness** – understanding licensure rules, emergency procedures, and documentation requirements in online care.

These frameworks work best when integrated into both individual practice and organizational policy. They ensure that clinicians are not only practicing safely but also growing in their capacity to serve diverse populations effectively online.