

Clinician Tips for Better Videoconferencing

If you are seeing patients or clients by videoconference, your technology is now your therapy office. Set it up with just as much care.

I. Start with a reliable internet connection

1. The best, most reliable internet connection is a wired connection from your router to your computer using an [ethernet cable](#). It is far superior to any Wi-Fi (wireless) connection. You can run ethernet cable up to 300 feet. If your computer has USB-C ports and no ethernet port, you'll also need an [ethernet to UCB-C adapter](#). (You can read more about the superior performance of a wired connection [here](#).)

2. If you absolutely must rely on Wi-Fi, make sure you are close enough to your router for maximum signal strength. Your computer will show signal strength in "bars." Anything less than maximum bars is inadequate and must be addressed.

3. If you can't run an ethernet cable and can't get close enough to your router, the next option is to extend your Wi-Fi coverage by replacing your router with a [mesh network](#). A mesh network uses a base station and satellite units and can extend your Wi-Fi to every corner of your space. Plan to spend \$250-\$450. You can read reviews and buying advice [here](#) and [here](#). (Note that a mesh network is not the same as a Wi-Fi extender which is *not* an adequate solution.)

II. Test your internet speed

Go to [speedtest.net](#) to test internet speed on the device you use for videoconferencing. Internet speed is measured in Mbps (megabits per second) and there are separate speeds for upload (outgoing data) and download (incoming data). At a bare minimum, you need reliable speeds of 5 Mbps for upload and download both. Practically speaking, you will need an internet plan that provides download speeds of at least 100 Mbps.

All internet-connected devices on your network share your connection and siphon speed (internet-connected devices include other computers, streaming services, games, smart home devices, etc.). You need to know your internet speed under realistic working conditions, so test your internet speed with other devices in use.

If your internet is too slow, contact your Internet Service Provider (ISP) to upgrade to a higher speed plan. There is no workaround for this. [Here](#) is an online calculator that can give you some guidance about the internet speed you need.

III. Close other applications

Close applications running in the background. Videoconferencing puts heavy demand on your computer. Applications running in the background tax it further and can degrade audio and video performance.

IV. Use a headset or external microphone

Straining to understand one another makes for a poor videoconference experience. Don't rely on your computer's built-in speaker and microphone. Instead, get a quality headset or external microphone. Advise your patients/clients to do the same.

Headsets with boom microphones (near your mouth) pick up your voice most clearly. The [Jabra Evolve 65](#) headset is a good value and comes in [mono](#) (one ear) and [stereo](#) (two ears) versions. Here are links to reviews of other [wired](#) and [wireless](#) models. If you have a newer computer with USB-C ports, you will also need a [USB-A to USB-C adapter](#).

If you prefer not to wear a headset, consider getting a broadcast-quality microphone like the [Blue Yeti](#). If you opt for a broadcast microphone, educate yourself on how to set it up for optimal results.

(My personal set-up is a [Blue Yeti](#) microphone, a [stereo-to-mono single earbud](#) plugged into the Blue Yeti, and [Krisp](#) noise-reduction software to filter out background noise.)

V. Make eye contact

Arrange your screen so the other person's video window is directly below your camera lens and as close to it as possible. When you look at them on your screen, they will read that as eye contact. If the video window is anywhere else on your screen, it will look like you are looking away. Your patients/clients should arrange their screens the same way.

VI. Look presentable on camera

1. Raise your webcam to eye level. Nothing looks worse on camera than looking up someone's nostrils, which is what your patient/client sees if you are using a laptop on a desk or table. Get a [laptop stand](#) or put your laptop on a stack of books. You will also need an external [keyboard](#) and [mouse](#).
2. Keep your distance from the webcam lens. Laptop cameras and webcams use wide angle lenses that distort your face when you get close. Keep a minimum 2-3 ft distance.
3. Be aware of your background. Position yourself in front of a neutral background. Declutter the space behind you. If you can't do that, consider putting a divider screen behind you.
4. Create good lighting. Your face should be evenly lit with no harsh shadows. Think of a television newscaster. Here are some lighting tips:
 - a. Your primary light source should be in front of you. If you have natural light from a window, position yourself with the window in front of you, or in front and a bit to the side (up to a 45° angle). If the light from the window is too bright, use a translucent curtain or shade for softer light (light-filtering cellular or honeycomb shades work well).
 - b. Don't sit with a window or other bright light source behind you. You will be backlit and look like a dark shadow. If there's a window behind you, use window shades or curtains to block the light (but don't use blinds with slats because they can wreak havoc with your camera's automatic light adjustments).

- c. Avoid mixing artificial and natural light. The combination of light sources causes distorted, unnatural colors. Try to use one light source or the other.
- d. If you use artificial light, make sure your face is well lit from light sources in front of you and near eye level. [LED desk lamps](#) work well because you can adjust brightness and point them where you want. Don't aim the light straight at your face. Create softer, more even lighting by bouncing the light off a light-colored wall or [other reflective surface](#). Alternatively, you can cover the lamp with [light diffusion fabric](#).

For a deeper dive into lighting, here are some useful resources:

<https://thewirecutter.com/blog/professional-video-call-from-home/>

<https://thewirecutter.com/blog/video-call-lighting-tips/>

<https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/8/21202907/zoom-tips-video-call-lighting-audio-look-your-best>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2020/04/11/zoom-meetings-go-better-these-6-tips-look-your-best/5125980002/>

Nine Tips for Getting the Most from Teletherapy

1. The most important thing is privacy. When we meet in my office, it's my responsibility to provide a private setting. When we meet remotely, it's up to you. Please do whatever is necessary to make certain you are in a private place where you will not be overheard or interrupted.
2. Settle into a comfortable chair but don't lie down or recline. To the extent possible, try to arrange yourself as you would if we were meeting in person.
3. Give yourself 10-15 minutes of quiet, alone time before and after sessions. You need time before your session to set aside the activities of the day and let your thoughts transition to therapy. You need time after to reflect and absorb. If possible, take a walk by yourself or set aside some alone time to sip a coffee or tea. It is unhelpful to jump from another activity into a therapy session or start another activity right after.
4. It is neither necessary nor desirable to keep your eyes fixed on the video screen. In face-to-face communication, people make and break off eye contact as part of the natural ebb and flow of communication. Feel free to look at me or look away as feels natural. You may find it helpful to turn your screen at a bit of an angle instead of facing it straight on. If you feel too close, you can reduce the size of the video window.
5. Dress as you would if we were meeting in person. Even though I may not be able to see all of what you are wearing, *you* know what you are wearing, and it can affect therapy in subtle ways.
6. Try to meet from the same location when possible. The physical location is part of the experience and consistency and predictability help.
7. Keep a box of tissues nearby. If you want, pour yourself a glass of water but don't snack or eat.
8. Silence other devices and close any applications running in the background.
9. If there is a problem affecting the audio or video, let me know and I'll do the same. It's better to acknowledge the problem and take steps to address it than struggle to understand one another.