



Informed Consent for TeleHealth Services from Healthcare Professionals

What is the purpose of this Informed Consent Form?

The purpose of this form is to provide information to parents/teachers/care givers and learners about TeleHealth Services which will allow parents to decide whether you wish to consent to remote Psychology and Counselling Services (for parents and employees), or Therapeutic Services, from Registered Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, Speech Language Therapists, Speech Therapist Audiologists and Physiotherapists for their child, using online media. Parents/teachers/care givers and learners can engage with the Specialist and ask any questions during the TeleHealth Services if they need clarification.

What is TeleHealth?

TeleHealth is the use of telecommunication technologies to provide psychological/counselling and therapy services such as professional consultation, therapy, guidance and support. The registered Healthcare Professional typically uses videoconferencing (such as Microsoft Teams) to administer client sessions in real-time but may utilise other formats, such as departmental email, for related communication. Some online platforms, such as WhatsApp are not secure, and the client needs to consent to this type of support method if there is not alternative means of communication.

Benefits and limitations

TeleHealth is an alternative to traditional face-to-face therapy and has been shown to be effective in helping with many psychosocial difficulties. In the time of COVID-19 lockdown this format is indicated as a successful approach to support as many employees, parents and learners are experiencing difficulties with adjusting to new routines, restricted space and movement and strained relationships. Many people have more mental health or behavioural difficulties as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown.

However, TeleHealth has limitations. As there is less “personal” face-to-face interaction, it can make support and therapy less of a relational experience. It is well-suited to brief therapy and support for less serious conditions, which can be managed in three to four sessions.

If indicated the healthcare professional will refer a client for appropriate individual face-to-face services for clients with more severe conditions such as clinical depression, substance dependence, or who are experiencing suicidal or homicidal thoughts. Like most forms of psychological support, counselling or therapy, TeleHealth may initially may not bring immediate results or immediate relieve and can at times feel if your problems get worse, but it is an important step towards receiving appropriate support. In some cases, a healthcare professional may offer appointments for a learner with their parents.

Who is eligible for TeleHealth Services from the Department of Education?

This service has been initiated by Eastern Cape Department of Education by Inclusive Education: Psychosocial Support Services, to utilize the eighty Psychologists, Registered Counsellors and Therapists who are registered with the Health Care Professions Council that can respond to the COVID-19 lockdown related psychological consequences. These professionals are usually mandated to provide psychosocial support services to learners who experience barriers to learning, in mainstream and special schools. These professionals are extended to parents/learners as it relates to support their children to improve mastering of the curriculum provided by the Department of Education and/or employees are therefore available during the COVID-19 Lockdown period.

The clients who are eligible for the TeleHealth services include:

1. Any Department of Education employee, particularly educators, whether employed by the Department or the School Governing Body, who is referred to services through the Employee Wellness Service.
 - a. Employees can be offered short-term counselling and psychological interventions to cope with symptoms that have presented as a result of the lockdown i.e. altered routines, poor coping strategies, financial strain, stress related disorders, anxiety and depression, and impaired relationships within the family situation, including support for parenting.
 - b. Educators can be offered short-term counselling and psychological interventions and are considered are a high-priority, due to the additional burden on them due to COVID-19 pandemic.

They will be supported to develop a routine for working from home, using online methods to prepare lesson plans and possibly delivering online teaching resources. When schools reopen, support will be essential for educators who learn to manage the regulations for preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, while ensuring the CAPS curriculum is delivered.

2. Any parent, family direct member or caregiver of a learner, who is experiencing challenges in managing their child's activities and routine as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown, or concerns raised on return to school can be supported through these services,
3. All learners will be supported such as:
 - a. Typically developing learners, aged 5 to 19 years-old, but who are vulnerable, anxious, withdrawn or disruptive due to family situation, socioeconomic difficulties, domestic abuse or any other psychosocial problems as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown;
 - b. Typically developing Senior Phase learners, particularly Grade 11 and 12 learners, experiencing mental health difficulties, anxiety, social withdrawal and poor coping strategies, as a result of disruption of the schooling calendar due to COVID-19 pandemic;
 - c. Learners (aged 5 to 19 years) with identified barriers to learning i.e. attentional problems, specific learning difficulties, intellectual disability, Autism Spectrum Disorders, physical disabilities, Deaf and hard of hearing learners, visual impairment, foetal alcohol disorder syndrome, behavioural problems etc.
 - d. Learners at Special Care Centres, who have severe to profound intellectual impairment and/or physical disabilities and communication difficulties.
4. Any parent, family member or caregiver of a learner at a Special School and/or Care Centre, who requires additional psychosocial or therapeutic support while at home to prevent regression of their child (learner) in their development or learning. Each learner at a Special School should have an individual support plan developed by the school educators and Therapists, to support their learning at home.

5. In the case that a learner does not have this in place, the family may be referred to the Special School Principal, who will coordinate a team of educators and Therapists to provide these services remotely from the school.

The Customer Care Centre

The Customer Care Centre (Toll Free Number 080 1212 570 or customercare@edu.ecprov.gov.za) will receive all calls or email queries from the public and direct referrals to the TeleHealth Services where necessary, within 24 hours of the call.

The Customer Care Centre will ask a number of pertinent questions, to ascertain the most urgent needs and to ensure the customer receives the most appropriate support. The TeleHealth services cannot offer a full range of services, nor offer these on a permanent basis, so please note the following:

- As a first intervention step, if a parent requires additional educational support for his or her child, it is best to request this from the child's class educator and the School Based Support Team who will conduct a Special Needs Assessment at school to ascertain the needs of the child; if necessary a referral will be made to the Educational Support Services (District-based Support Team) within the child's district.
- Learners with substance abuse problems will be referred to appropriate services and learners who experience domestic abuse may be referred to Childline and Department of Social Development, without necessarily receiving TeleHealth Services.
- Parents/adults who are experiencing marital difficulties, domestic violence or abuse will be referred to Family Services or other agencies.
- Employees experiencing financial difficulties, relationships issues at work and possible substance abuse will be referred to Employee Wellness programmes, for appropriate counselling.

- In the case of a trauma, crisis or serious accident of a learner or educator at school parents, learners and/or staff may be referred to the Psychologist/District Director and/or School Health and Safety Directorate, as per standard Departmental protocols.
- The Care Centre will provide the Parent or Care Giver the name and contact number of a Specialist closest to the learner.
- Learners and personnel will be referred to ECDOE Psychologists or counsellors for counselling services.

Technological requirements and competences

To engage in TeleHealth, a parent will require a device that can connect to the internet and be able to install and use the software that we agree to use for communication. A reliable high-speed internet connection (minimum 4Mbps for video) is also required. Please be aware that TeleHealth may utilise large amounts of data, especially if video conferencing is used (300-800MB/hour). Assistance will be given to download suitable software. The professional may also be able to call you using standard cellular to cellular phone calls, which is in preference to Whats App calls which are not secure.

Attending appointments and procedures for technical difficulties

Disruptions can occur when using the internet to communicate. Should our communication be disrupted, the official that has contacted the learner or parent/care giver will immediately attempt to reconnect and resume the session. However, if the Psychologist or Therapist are repeatedly unable to reconnect for 10 minutes, the session will be rescheduled (via email) to a later date once connectivity is resumed. Parents/learners/employees are encouraged to ensure they are available ten minutes (especially if the appointment involves children) before the scheduled appointment time, and that their device is fully charged and that parents that contacted the Specialist have sufficient data (approx. 100MB) for the session. If TeleHealth is offered to learners under 18-years old, a responsible adult also needs to be accountable for ensuring the learner attends appointments.

Confidentiality

Any information provided to a Specialist will remain confidential and will not be given to a third party unless the parent give specific permission to release the information. However, please be aware that if there is a significant risk that a customer can seriously harming themselves or another person, the

Specialist is obliged to act to prevent harm, which may involve giving information to a third party. TeleHealth utilises the Internet for the transmission of personal information and therefore there are some increased risks to confidentiality. The Department healthcare professionals may only use official email addresses to send information, to protect your confidentiality. Parents must please consider password protecting the devices they use and installing antivirus software to prevent access by third parties. Parents must please ensure they use a private environment at home when engaging in videoconferencing or telephone, so that intrusions can be minimised.

Crisis management

It can be difficult to deal with emergency crisis situations when using TeleHealth Services as participants in this support provisioning are often in separate geographical locations. The Specialist will therefore, ask the parent to provide the contact details of a local family or friend and a local medical practitioner who can be contacted in the case of an emergency. If the parent/care giver is in crisis and there is a disruption while we are engaging in consultation, then they can immediately phone the Specialist by phone.

Legal recourse

The Specialist is registered as a (***enter registration category***) Psychologist/Occupational Therapist/Speech Language Therapist (Registration No: PS ***enter reg number***) with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and his/her professional behaviour is governed by this regulatory body. Please note that parents/ teachers or care givers who are not located in South Africa then any legal recourse will only be available in South Africa. The parent/teacher/care giver or learner can verify my registration with the HPCSA at the following link: <http://isystems.hpcsa.co.za/register/>.

Only registered Psychologists/Counsellors will provide counselling services.

Costs

These services are provided free of costs by the Eastern Cape Department of Education. However, the Department is unable to cover parents personal costs of data or wi-fi usage required for you to engage in TeleHealth services.

What does informed consent mean?

There are a few important principles related to informed consent:

- Parents/teachers/care givers and learners must be given relevant information. Ask the Psychologist, Counsellor or Therapist if you have questions about TeleHealth Services offered.
- Parents/teachers/care givers and learners have the right to understand the information. Ask the Psychologist, Counsellor or Therapist if you do not understand.
- Parents/teachers/care givers and learners have the right to choose. If you do not agree to TeleHealth, you may refuse to participate. Parents/teachers/care givers and learners may agree to or refuse specific activities and procedures.
- Parents/teachers/care givers and learners have the right to stop using TeleHealth services any time. Parents/teachers/care givers and learners can change their mind about TeleHealth services even in the middle of a session.
- Parents/teachers/care givers and learners can agree or refuse in writing or verbally. They may give the Parents/teachers/care givers and learners consent using the form below or Parents/teachers/care givers and learners may also give consent or change their mind by telling the Psychologist, Counsellor or Therapist. Consent and refusal to accept services that is provided verbally will be documented by Psychologist or Therapist.
- Parents/teachers/care givers and learners can ask about alternatives to TeleHealth Services. If a parents/teachers/care givers and learners refuse or change their mind about TeleHealth services, the Psychologist, Counsellor or Therapist will discuss any other options with them. The Psychologist, Counsellor or Therapist may or may not be able to offer alternative services.

Normal consent rules apply:

- Signatures from adults (employees and/or parents).
- Signatures by child (if older than 12), by parent if younger than 12.
- If recording takes place, consent needs to be from parents.
- A child's consent would be sufficient, but parental signed consent is needed for TeleHealth to take place. This would be since the child would probably need to use their parents' equipment/phone/data for the session. The session will probably be taking place in the home, so parents would need to give consent.

- Instructions for parent/learner to find a private space - as their confidentiality might be impacted if one of their family members intrudes in a private consultation between the client and the healthcare professional.
- Storing of records of TeleHealth interventions will be consistent with Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act and Healthcare Professional Association of South Africa regulations.

Additional consent for use of unsecure online platforms:

- The parent/adult will need to consent to the use of unsecure online platforms such as What's App for the sending of information and documents, and in this case the Department will accept no liability for breach of confidentiality/privacy from a 3rd party.



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Consent form

1. I have read the above and understand the risks associated with engaging in TeleHealth. I agree to participate in TeleHealth and comply with the procedures outlined above.

2. The type of support I have requested is the following:

a. _____

b. _____

3. I give consent to the use of secure online platforms and my preferred choice is _____ yes/no

4. I give consent to the use of unsecure online platforms such as _____ and understand the risks involved _____ yes/no

5. I confirm that the following identifying details are correct:

First name: _____ Surname: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Name of child/learner: _____ School: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Grade: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____ Contact number: _____

6. I agree that in the case of an emergency, where there is a threat of harm that the following persons can be contacted:

Family/Friend Name: _____ Telephone No: _____

Medical Practitioner/General Practitioner: _____

Telephone No: _____



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Client Signature (over 12 years): _____ Date:

Place: _____

Witness signature: _____ Date: _____