

Top Five Tips for Virtual Counseling Sessions

Community Counseling Training Center

1. Ensure you have a secure and private place to be uninterrupted for the full hour.

Perhaps the most important tip for engaging in virtual counseling sessions is to do what you can to ensure you can speak honestly and openly about your concerns. This means feeling relatively certain you will not be interrupted, making sure you have anything you might need for the session within reach (like pen, paper, tissues, water, etc.), and that the space you are using is relatively soundproof. For example, you should not join your session from a coffee shop, waiting room, or barber shop. Your closed room, office, or parked car might be places you could have some uninterrupted privacy. For individual sessions, you should be the only person in the room during your session time.

We also recommend using a headset with a built-in microphone, for two reasons. One is that the quality of the audio we hear from you is much better – we want to hear everything you have to say to us! The other reason is that by using a headset, only you will be able to hear what your counselor is saying to you. This protects your privacy. If you do not have a private space available to you, and you are open to it, you may be able to hold your session in-person in our office. You would need to talk with your counselor about this option, and at this time, you would need to wear a full nose and mouth covering face-mask upon entering the building and throughout your session.

2. Minimize distractions.

It is important that for this session-hour, you are able to focus on the reasons you are seeking counseling. And that can be hard when using our phones or computers to do counseling because so much of our lives happens on these devices. Make sure to close all open windows and browser tabs other than Microsoft Teams. Your counselor will provide direction if your session work may include accessing other apps or internet based content for your counseling work. You will also want to set your phone and other devices to Do Not Disturb; turn off all other screens in your space like the TV. Your counselor will do the same. You are the sole focus of their attention during your sessions.

3. Have your technology ready for the session.

Ensure your device is charged or plugged in and that your internet or cellular connection is stable. We recommend using a laptop with web cam. If you use your phone, set it up so that the camera is focused on your face and your hands can be free. This ensures your counselor is able to really pay attention to you! For video-conferencing sessions, remember that you should join the session with your Microsoft Office account credentials. NIU affiliates can use their student or staff accounts if you wish. The less technology troubleshooting we need to do during session, the more we can work on the things you are interested in. Private phone-conferencing sessions can be facilitated if you do not have access to internet or are having irregular video-conferencing access issues one day.

4. Treat the time as you would if you were coming in for a face to face session.

If you were joining us in the Community Counseling Training Center, you would most likely be dressed for work or class. You would have probably combed your hair, brushed your teeth, eaten something, and be alert and ready to engage with others. This dress and focus is what you should plan and prepare for with your virtual counseling sessions as well. We want you to be able to be authentic and real with us, also be ready for our time working together. If you realize you need to eat or take care of some chores during our time together, please call (815-753-9312) or e-mail us (cahc_cctc@niu.edu) to reschedule your appointment. Obviously, things may happen when we are at home that wouldn't happen if we were in-person in the CCTC . . . We understand that! As much as is reasonable, try and hold off on multitasking when we are together. We believe this will help you create the best possible experience in your counseling.

5. Show up ready to work!

If you have taken care of all of the above, you are ready for virtual counseling! Now all that is left to do is talk, reflect, brainstorm, share, feel, and choose. Counseling can be a powerful way to reach your goals and process your thoughts and feelings, and it is also hard work, sometimes! By using these tips and fully engaging in the processes of counseling, we believe you will benefit from this experience.

As always, share any concerns or questions with your counselor.