Rula

In-person session checklist

The following is a checklist of things to consider when conducting an in-person therapy session. These suggestions reflect best practice standards **as well as requirements from many health plan payers in network with Rula;** however, not all items on this checklist will be relevant to you and/or your specific practice.

Security, confidentiality, and compliance

- ❑ The location must be private enough to ensure client confidentiality and reasonably guarantee sessions won't be interrupted. This includes a door that closes fully, the ability to cover any windows, and some degree of sound proofing, which can be accomplished via a sound machine.
- ❑ Ensure your office can be closed off from surrounding space during a session, and that other clients, family members, or visitors cannot enter while a session is underway.
- ❑ Make sure all confidential information is secured physically (e.g., locked cabinets) and electronically (e.g., password-protected computer, encryption, etc.).
- ❑ Ensure records are legible and easy to locate, and that they are not accessible to anyone who isn't authorized to see them.
- ❑ If you share a computer with anyone, ensure PHI sits behind a separate log-in.
- ❑ Ensure the equipment you use for the practice (computer, phone line, fax, file cabinets) is dedicated to the practice.
- ❑ Ensure any consent forms are signed and present in the patient's electronic chart.
- ❑ If possible, have a separate entrance and exit to avoid patients seeing each other.
- ❑ Display your license(s) in a location that is clearly visible to the patient if your state and/or Licensing Board requires you to do so.
- ❑ Confirm you hold a local business license if your city or county requires one for your practice.
- ❑ Take measures to ensure your office is ADA-compliant
- ❑ Ensure that all furniture and other items in the office are accessible to clients with varying needs (e.g., people with different body shapes/sizes, etc.)
- ❑ Ensure that doorways are accessible (wide enough) and that hallways and rooms are free from obstruction
- ❑ Ensure that there is an elevator or office is on the first floor
- ❑ Ensure that there are temperature control options (AC/heat) to control and maintain a comfortable temperature
- ❑ Ensure that there is at least one accessible-identified parking space if your building has fewer than 25 parking spaces. If there are between 26 and 50 total spaces, at least two accessible spaces are required.
- ❑ Ensure that safe restrooms for clients of all genders are accessible, with adequate space for a wheelchair and grab bars where required.
- ❑ Arrange interpretation and any auxiliary communication aids a client needs, at no cost to the client, and make sure your forms and any portal or website you use are accessible.
- ❑ Ensure that patients are not being recorded on video, either during sessions or via security cameras maintained by you.
- ❑ Be responsive to a health plan if a health plan payer performs a site audit. A health plan payer may schedule a visit to review your office against its standards and examine your record-keeping practices, and may issue findings that require a corrective action plan.

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Etiquette and patient comfort

- ❏ Place a box of tissues close to where the patient will be seated.
- ❏ Position a clock behind the client so you can keep track of time without visibly checking it.
- ❏ Ensure your office has comfortable chairs or a couch, and a space where the patient can place their personal items.
- ❏ Consider your decor choices, select options that convey a warm, supportive, inclusive environment conducive to therapy.
- ❏ If offering food/refreshments, please ensure you have multiple options available for varying dietary needs and avoid common allergy foods (e.g., no peanuts/peanut products in the office to ensure the safety of these individuals)

Your office space

- ❏ Ensure the office is clearly identified from the outside (house or suite number, or a sign), the entrance is well lit, and your office hours are posted.
- ❏ Ensure the office, treatment rooms, and reception area clean and uncluttered.
- ❏ Ensure the space is well lit.
- ❏ Ensure furnishings are permanent, professional, and stable, and arranged in an organized configuration — avoid card table chairs, plastic chairs, or other unstable furniture.
- ❏ Ensure you have enough treatment rooms for the size and type of your practice, and that each is arranged to protect client privacy.
- ❏ Ensure you have an appropriate waiting area with adequate seating for your practice. If you don't have one, tell clients in advance where to wait, avoid scheduling overlapping appointments, and have a plan for where a child waits during a parent's session.

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Personal and patient safety

- ❏ Place your chair in a location that allows easy access to an exit.
- ❏ Consider installing a panic button to quickly contact emergency services in the event of a patient crisis or when your personal safety is compromised.
- ❏ Share any safety precautions taken to prevent transmission of illnesses and ensure those measures are followed (e.g., face masks, air filtration, active symptom policy, etc.).
- ❏ Ensure that you have a secure place to put your valuables, including laptop, purse/wallet, etc.
- ❏ Ensure the office complies with local fire codes and safety regulations.
- ❏ Ensure smoke and fire alarms are installed and working, and that fire extinguishers are present and routinely inspected.
- ❏ Post evacuation routes conspicuously, and keep exits clearly marked and unobstructed.
- ❏ Post emergency telephone numbers where staff and clients can see them.
- ❏ Maintain a written office safety plan, and a disaster-preparedness plan covering how you'll continue client care if you lose access to the space.
- ❏ Screen for elevated risk of violence before a first in-person session, and be prepared to refer a patient out if they can't be seen safely in your setting.
- ❏ If you work with patients who have the potential to be violent, consider having an office location where another clinician is available, such as a group practice building, so someone else can step in if a patient escalates.

If you prescribe

- ❏ Ensure any prescription medications, controlled substances, and samples are locked in a cabinet in a secure area, and that any dispensation is logged.
- ❏ Ensure all medication stock is within its expiration date, and dispose of expired medication as your state's hazardous waste rules require.
- ❏ Ensure needles, syringes, medications, and prescription pads are inaccessible to patients.
- ❏ Maintain a written policy for handling and disposing of biohazardous and hazardous materials, train anyone working in the office on it, and contain sharps and hazardous waste as your state requires.

Home-based offices

- ❏ Tell clients in advance that your office is located in a home, and let them know if a household pet or service animal will be present.
- ❏ Ensure the office is separate from the common areas of the residence, can be closed off during sessions, and that household members cannot enter nor overhear while a session is underway.
- ❏ Ensure the office and any restroom clients use are free of personal effects such as medications, personal papers, and personal photographs.
- ❏ Make a restroom available for client use only.
- ❏ Ensure there is off-street or separate parking for clients.

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Prior to your session:

- ❑ Assess your office space for the above consideration through the lens: “*Do I feel as though I can conduct safe, supportive therapy in this space for clients with varying needs while meeting my own needs as a person and as a therapist?*”
- ❑ Ensure that the client has all of the correct information about their first in-person appointment, which can be communicated via the portal, including:
  - ❑ Address
  - ❑ Instructions on how to find the office (photos helpful)
  - ❑ Who they can call if they are lost/ going to be late?
  - ❑ Office staff names, roles, how they can expect to interact with them
  - ❑ Office policies
  - ❑ If there will be others in the office
  - ❑ What accommodations the office has (water, coffee, A/C, etc)
  - ❑ Locations of elevator, bathrooms, etc
  - ❑ Check-in procedure
  - ❑ What to expect
  - ❑ Emergency exits/procedure, including natural disaster concerns
- ❑ Share your expectations for in-person service with the client (including how to respect your office) and what can happen if these expectations are not met.

Day of your session:

- ❑ Patient checks in/provider is notified of their arrival.
- ❑ The missed appointment policy should still be followed in in-person settings
- ❑ Tending to good client experience- welcoming them, ensuring their physical needs are met, and inviting them into the office space and asking them to sit where they like
- ❑ Turn on white noise machine, if applicable
  - ❑ Orienting client to places of safety (e.g., doorway, window, different seating options with varying views on the room, quick tour of the space, etc.)
- ❑ Conduct session
- ❑ End session, ensuring the client has left the premises.

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Rula resources

- ❏ Provider Community Support Groups Events Calendar (daily drop-ins, M-F)
- ❏ **Rula Therapist Client Crisis Response - Quick Decision Flow & Guide**
  - ❏ This article details the Rula Therapist C.A.L.M and H.E.L.P. process, which is designed to support clients experiencing a mental health crisis such as thoughts of suicide, self-harm, or harming others, sudden and dramatic changes in mood, and/or a loss of touch with reality such as hallucinations or delusions.
- ❏ In-Person Response Plan Checklist for Medical, Fire, and Police Emergencies
  - ❏ Develop a Written Emergency Response Plan
    - ❏ Define your roles and responsibilities during emergencies
    - ❏ Create emergency policies
    - ❏ Maintain on-site emergency supplies and equipment
    - ❏ Consider office proximity to emergency services and hospitals
    - ❏ Account for skills and training of any on-site personnel
    - ❏ Identify types of emergencies most likely to occur in your practice
  - ❏ Roles and Responsibilities
    - ❏ If not a solo practice, consider designating who will call emergency authorities
    - ❏ Plan to meet and direct emergency responders ❏ Document the course of events
    - ❏ Plan to manage other patients during the emergency
  - ❏ Acquire Necessary Emergency Supplies
    - ❏ Ensure supplies match common emergencies in your setting
    - ❏ Maintain adequate first aid supplies
  - ❏ Be Prepared
    - ❏ Maintain your emergency response plan
    - ❏ Uphold your emergency care training as indicated
  - ❏ Implement Communication Strategies
    - ❏ Maintain awareness of your local emergency resources and lines of communication
    - ❏ Foster a culture of safety in your practice
  - ❏ Take Preventive Measures
    - ❏ Use thorough intake and medical questionnaires to identify potential risks
    - ❏ Prepare for anxiety-related emergencies, which are common during crisis events
  - ❏ Regular Review and Practice
    - ❏ Schedule periodic reviews and updates of your practice emergency plan
    - ❏ Conduct regular practice implementation of your emergency plan

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Note on payer requirements

Providers are expected to review and comply with the office requirements for the individual health plan payers with which they are credentialed. Below are some examples we have compiled of health plan payer specific office requirements or self-audit tools:

- Optum – Home Office Audit Tool
- Kaiser Permanente – Office Environment Assessment
- Cigna – Administrative Guide
- Carelon – Provider Manual – *Pages 26, 82*
- Magellan – Provider Manual
- Oscar Health – Provider Manual – *Pages 16, 62*
- Rocky Mountain Health – Provider Manual – *Pages, 29, 32-33*
- Select Health – Provider Manual – *Pages 42-43*
- AvMed – Provider Manual – *Ch. 4 Pages 6-7, Ch. 8 Pages 16-17*
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of MN – Provider Manual – *Page 3-27*
- Sentara Health Plans – Provider Manual – *Page 43*