



## Policy and consent form for video games, virtual reality and online games in therapy

Play and therapy have been used together in treatment for over 50 years. Gaming can be a useful therapeutic tool in treatment as it allows for rapport building and increasing individualization of the treatment plan. Video games, online games, and role-playing games have their specific benefits and risks. This document is designed to inform clients of those benefits and risks and consent to specific gameplay. This document also reports what the expectations and etiquettes during the use of these digital supplemental platforms are.

**General Awareness:** I will evaluate if gaming would be a good fit for clinical treatment. Some areas I will evaluate are: gaming devices you have, what games you own, your access to the Internet, your bandwidth, and your personal preferences around gaming. If you have a specific interest in certain games that I have not used before, I will evaluate if they can be used therapeutically. I will also consider your developmental age and, if a youth, what your guardians will allow. If you do not have the means to engage in gaming, such as limited Internet access or lack of access to gaming devices, it will not be employed in treatment. Please be mindful that general accessibility to Internet is also one of the determinations of whether online therapy is an appropriate medium for providing treatment and if not accessible, could refer you to a more appropriate provider.

There will be various styles and types of games that we will consider using in your treatment. Some are linear and story-based, where we must accomplish specific tasks in a particular order to complete the game. Some are freeform and allow more opportunity to choose how we engage in the game. Some are more traditional, including card games, matching games, and puzzles. We may even create our own game, depending on which platform we use. No matter the style or outcome, I will consider your clinical needs, the needs identified in the treatment plan, and what interventions can be used with the game. This will be the basis of what we choose to engage in.

It is important to note that gaming can be a very personal experience. Depending on the style and type of gaming, it can often require you to open yourself up, making you more emotionally vulnerable. Additionally, specific themes and gameplay styles may be triggering, particularly if you have a trauma history. It's crucial for you to be aware of this and be open to communicating your needs and expectations with me. Even if not

emotionally or mentally triggered, games can be challenging to master, such as learning controls or understanding the rules. If you need me to pause and explain or assist you in figuring out the controls, please do not hesitate to do so.

Additionally, you have the right to discontinue using it whenever you feel uncertain, uncomfortable, or are unable to understand its connection to your treatment. Even if in the middle of gameplay, you can stop at any time. We will explore the reasons for discontinuing, and collaboratively, we will create new boundaries to continue to game, utilize new tools, or learn new coping skills. If clinically determined that the gameplay is not therapeutically helpful, it will be removed as part of the treatment plan.

**Game Rating:** Another consideration when choosing a game to play includes the game's Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating. The game's content and the client's age and maturity level will be considered when selecting a game. Below you will find a description of the ESRB ratings.

- Titles rated EC (Early Childhood) have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older.
- Titles rated E (Everyone) have content that may be suitable for ages 6 and older.
- Titles rated E10+ (Everyone 10+) have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older.
- Titles rated T (Teen) have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older.
- Titles rated M (Mature) have content that may be suitable for ages 17 and older.
- Titles rated AO (Adults Only) have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older.

**Expectations and Etiquettes:** There are certain expectations around gaming, including online prosocial engagement and behavior. I will review these expectations with you before engaging in the gameplay. Throughout gameplay, I will also remind you of them. If there is a continued failure to engage appropriately due to active refusal to change behaviors, I will discontinue using gaming as part of the treatment plan. These are some, but not all, to keep in mind when we use this therapeutic tool:

- Before we begin, we may need to "friend" each other to be in the same game or private server. If that is the case, after gameplay, I will "unfriend" you, as part of maintaining privacy and confidentiality. You will be required to do the same.
- Before starting the game, ensure you're in a private, safe, and secure location to engage in gameplay.
- Before gameplay, you may need to shut off notifications on your device or switch your game into "hidden mode," so other players you may be friends with do not see you're in the game.
- You will not be allowed to invite others into the game.
- Neither of us will record gameplay or the session without proper consent and documentation to do so. This will have been determined before gameplay.
- If a game has a chat component, we will not use this to communicate. All communication is made through my identified HIPAA/GDPR compliant software. This is to ensure confidentiality.
- Neither of us will disclose personal identification information in these games. That means we will not provide addresses, names, dates of birth, or that we are in an online therapy session.

- If games require a login feature, we will use non-primary email addresses, create usernames that are not identifying, and/or create avatar names that are non-identifying.
- Neither of us will disclose our gaming usernames or account information to others online. That means we will not share login information, usernames, or other gaming. Only prior approved individuals, such as guardians or spouses, will have access to this information.
- You may be asked to close other screens or turn off other notifications that distract or take up bandwidth.
- Respecting and allowing each other opportunities to understand gameplay language, as often gameplay often includes learning new lingo or new communication style.

**Limited Confidentiality and Limited HIPAA Compliance:** As your therapist, I strive to protect your private health information, which includes, but is not limited to, your demographic information, data on treatment progress, date, location, and time of sessions, and even keeping confidential that you are receiving services with me. Some supplemental digital platforms used may not comply with HIPAA standards. If you consent to let me work with these technologies, I will ask that you agree to a limited waiver of your HIPAA rights to privacy and understand that I will, with all due diligence, attempt to protect you and your privacy. Some examples of what information these platforms would have access to include:

- Your IP address if using the Internet.
- Knowledge of time spent and types of gameplay used.
- Images associated with digital gaming accounts.
- Suggestions on content based on having received "cookies."
- Attempts to contact me on unsecured platforms and any response, or lack of response, to them.
- Shared records of chat conversations.
  - Though I have asked above to use the HIPAA compliant software for chat, you may choose to send messages within the digital platforms, including saying "hello." This information would then be shared and stored on these platforms.
- Shared images or screenshots.

Though you opt-in to use these digital supplemental platforms and provide limited waiver of your HIPAA rights, I will still do my best to maintain confidentiality. This includes using private servers whenever possible, not sharing logging information, and continued communication through HIPAA compliant software. Additionally, you can also be an active participant in maintaining confidentiality. Please consider the limits to confidentiality when using these technologies. Consider whom you allow having access to your login information for these games. Be mindful of how you are maintaining confidentiality when engaging in online therapy, including engaging in sessions in a private room or using safety measures, such as wearing headphones.

**Video Games:** A video game is an interactive game played using a specialized electronic gaming device or a computer or mobile device, and displayed on a screen, either through the device or on a monitor/television. These games may or may not require access to the Internet. When utilizing a video game involving a gaming device, such as "Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch, mobile phone, etc." it will be with a device you already own. There will be no expectation of purchasing a device. The specific video game played will be one you

already own or have access to. There is no expectation of buying a game. Lastly, any in-game purchases, used either through actual money or through in-game currency, will be my expense. There will be no expectation for you to spend additional funds. You may choose to purchase items not related to therapeutic gameplay at your own discretion.

**Online Games:** An online game is a video game that is either partially or primarily played through the Internet or any other computer network. When utilizing online gaming, there is an expectation for access to the Internet. The device used will be a computer, and the controls are often a mouse and a keyboard. This form of gameplay may involve creating user logins or using the screen share feature of the HIPAA compliant video conferencing platform chosen for the session. The specific online game played will be one you can easily have access to. There is no expectation to purchase a game. Lastly, any in-game purchases, used either through actual money or through in-game currency, will be my expense. There will be no expectation for you to spend additional funds. You may choose to purchase items not related to therapeutic gameplay at your own discretion.

**Themes:** Games have various themes, and as part of our consideration for gameplay, we want to identify any that you are not comfortable with. Even if the game is rated appropriate for your age, gameplay can be triggering when specific scenarios or graphics occur. Please consider some of these themes and what you are and are not comfortable with.

- Body horror: gore, rot, needles, served body parts, etc.
- Bodily fluids: blood, vomit, excrement, etc.
- Spiritual horror: demons, possession, souls, undead, ghosts, etc.
- Vermin: rats, spiders, snakes, etc.
- Phobias: heights, claustrophobia, etc.
- Violence: harm to animals, injury to people, abuse, etc.
- Sexual abuse: objectification, unwanted suggestive language, unwanted advances, etc.
- Romance: relationships, partnering, marrying, intimate touching, kissing, etc.
- Physical health: cancer, chronic illness, paralysis, etc.
- Mental health: depression, hallucinations, PTSD, anxiety, etc.
- Discrimination: homophobia, sexism, racism, ableism, etc.
- Current events and issues: police violence, societal disenfranchisement, poverty, politics, etc.

I understand that it may be jarring to read these themes, but some of them are intentional within the gameplay, and others, including themes of discrimination, are often subtle and missed by those who are not triggered by them. Though some gameplay does not involve any storyline and may include simple online games such as cards or matching games, it is essential to be informed and aware of the potential themes we may engage in.

Before choosing games, we will identify the possible themes we will run into, and you can notify me if you wish to engage in them. If you are triggered during gameplay, you will inform me immediately, and we will review what triggered you. We may decide to discontinue gameplay, postpone gameplay, or attempt to continue gameplay with a heightened awareness or using coping skills or other mediums to address potential symptoms

of being triggered. If you do not wish to examine this, then we will formulate a new plan for the session, which may include discontinuing gameplay, postponing gameplay, or attempting to continue gameplay with a heightened awareness or using coping skills or other mediums to address potential symptoms of being triggered.

Virtual Reality interventions using a Head Mounted Display are only available for children aged 13 and over. Interventions using a VR viewer (eg a casing that holds a VR activity on a smartphone) may be used with parental agreement only. It is important to consider in advance the availability of devices, internet connection, bandwidth and floor-space. I provide a carefully chosen range of multiplayer interventions and there is no expectation for clients to purchase equipment and games specifically for their therapy.

Although it is exciting to use our senses to access experiences in virtual reality the impact of bringing - imaginations to life can sometimes become overwhelming. In addition to the considerations around triggering and themes, we also consider carefully how I can help clients to feel regulated and grounded in their bodies. Children and young people can experience physical symptoms when moving around in specific virtual environments, causing their bodies and senses to become out of synch. It is essential that they have access to water, and that we agree a process to relieve symptoms of nausea which may include leaving the virtual environment to spend time in a safe, comfortable space, if either they or I feel concerned about their physical symptoms. We have a break every 15 minutes, meaning that we spend no more than 30 minutes of a 50 minute session in a virtual environment.

All technology-based interventions, especially with children and young people, are used with caution and with ongoing, specialist clinical supervision.

**Agreement:** By signing the signature page attached, I agree with the following statements:

1. I have read all sections of the "Gaming Consent Form" and understand my rights as a client.
2. I attest that I had a conversation with my therapist and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this document and to use gaming in treatment.
3. I attest that all questions if asked, were discussed and answered in a language I understood.
4. I attest that I understand that I am "opting-in" using technology or other digital supplemental material that does not comply with HIPAA standards for treatment and therefore release my therapist of liability.
5. I attest that I understand the differences in gaming that could be utilized in my treatment.
6. I attest that I understand the limits to confidentiality regarding using gaming and gaming platforms.
7. I understand that my therapist is an independent practitioner; therefore, the platforms for gaming used are not responsible for my care or treatment and that my therapist does not have an affiliation with their products.
8. I attest that I will maintain the expectations and etiquette regarding gaming that my therapist has established and am fully aware that my therapist may choose to discontinue using gaming in treatment if I do not engage with them.
9. I acknowledge that no guarantees have been made about the effects of using gaming in treatment on my condition/s.
10. I acknowledge that my developmental age and access to gaming will be considered before gaming is incorporated into my treatment plan.

11. I understand that I can bring up any concerns regarding potential triggering content anytime throughout treatment, including during active gameplay.
12. I attest that I understand that I may terminate using gaming in treatment whenever I feel it is no longer useful or necessary.
13. I understand that the use of VR is limited to a maximum of 30 minutes with a break every 15 minutes. Full access via Head Mounted Displays is available to children aged 13 plus only, and is subject to the same agreements and considerations and that apply to all online and video games.

Signature Page:

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Client's Printed Name

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Client's Signature

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Date

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Legal Guardian Printed Name

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Legal Guardian Signature

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Date

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Therapist Printed Name

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Therapist Signature and License Type

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Date