

# Psychological Tele-assessment: Crucial 21st Century Competencies for Equity and Access

Melanie Wilcox, PhD

November 20, 2023



Mountain Plains (HHS Region 8)

**MHTTC**

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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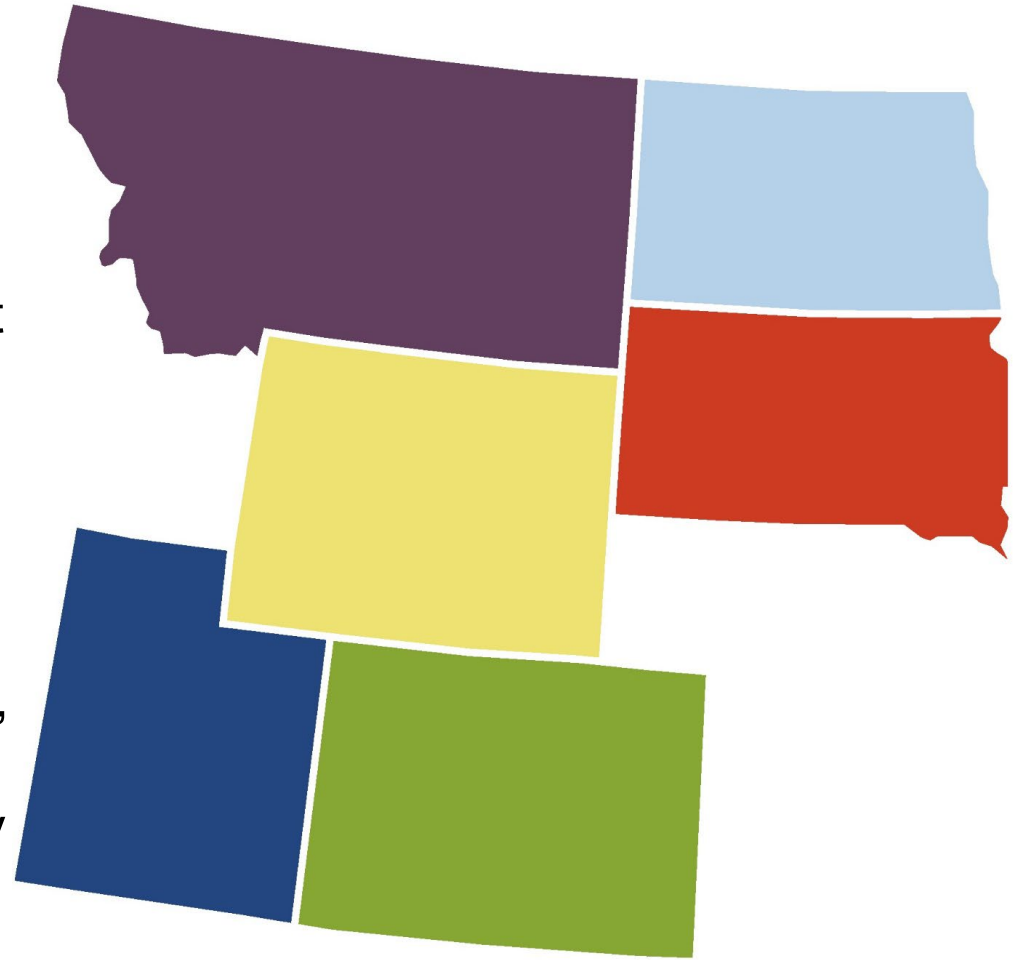
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# The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center

The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (Mountain Plains MHTTC) provides training and technical assistance to individuals who serve persons with mental health concerns throughout Region 8 (Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming).

We belong to the Technology Transfer Center (TTC) Network, a national network of training and technical assistance centers serving the needs of mental health, substance use and prevention providers. The work of the TTC Network is under a cooperative agreement by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA).



# Land Acknowledgement Statement

Today, the University of North Dakota rests on the ancestral lands of the Pembina and Red Lake Bands of Ojibwe and the Dakota Oyate - presently existing as composite parts of the Red Lake, Turtle Mountain, White Earth Bands, and the Dakota Tribes of Minnesota and North Dakota. We acknowledge the people who resided here for generations and recognize that the spirit of the Ojibwe and Oyate people permeates this land. As a university community, we will continue to build upon our relations with the First Nations of the State of North Dakota - the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Nation, Spirit Lake Nation, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians.



The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED  
AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND  
ACCEPTING OF  
DIVERSE CULTURES,  
GENDERS,  
PERSPECTIVES,  
AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND  
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS  
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR  
OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND  
FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND  
AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR  
AND UNDERSTANDABLE

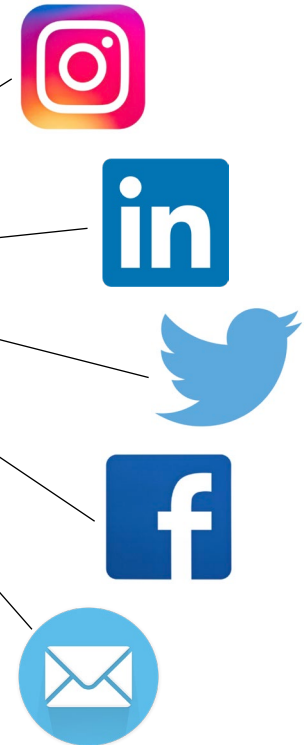
CONSISTENT WITH  
OUR ACTIONS,  
POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS




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Expanding Access to  
Care Through Ethical  
and Competence  
Practice of  
Psychological Tele-  
Assessment

Melanie M. Wilcox,  
Ph.D., ABPP

# Why Conduct Tele- Assessment?



## Health and Safety

Responding,  
Preparedness,  
Accommodations



## Empirical Evidence

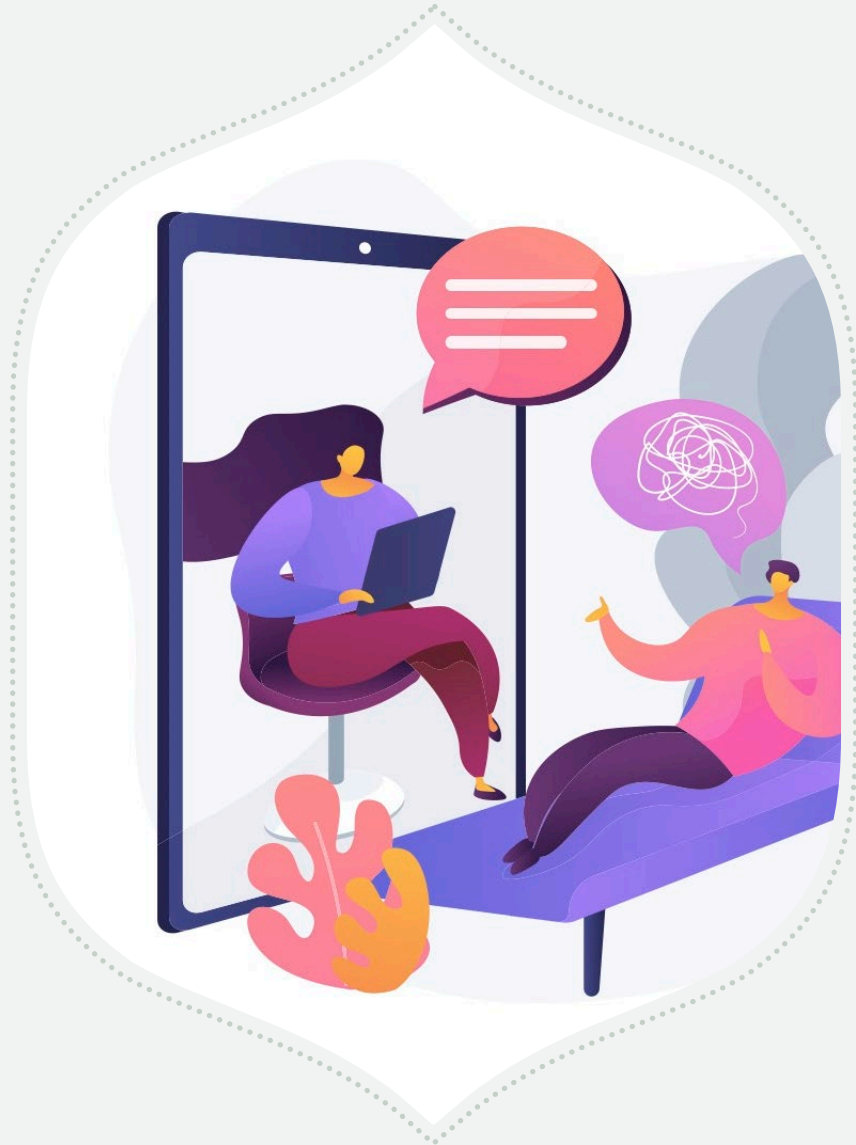
In support of  
tele-assessment;  
no evidence for  
PPE



## Increasing Access

Rural, urban,  
disabilities





# Shifting Assessment Practice

Though I had a little bit of experience with tele-assessment pre-pandemic, I did NOT anticipate becoming an “expert” in tele-assessment, or really engaging tele-assessment again at all



# What Can Actually Be Done Via Tele-Assessment?

You'd be surprised!

- ✓ Personality assessment
- ✓ Psychodiagnostic Assessment
- ✓ Cognitive Assessment (yes!)
- ✓ Some neuropsych assessments
- ✓ Career assessment
- ✓ Complete batteries for ADHD and – sometimes – ASD

# The Rise of Tele- Assessment

- Tele-assessment did not begin with COVID-19: Scholars and practitioners have been investigating the potential usefulness of tele-assessment for approximately the past five years
  - Increases access for individuals in underserved areas
  - Increases potential access to lower-cost assessment
  - This had, of course, allowed assessment to continue for some despite the pandemic







# What I've learned

- It's actually fun!
- It is more flexible
- Your potential client base is much larger
- It extends services to people who otherwise may not be able to access them
- I think more of us should be trained in and prepared for tele-assessment

# Clarifying Terms: What Is Tele-Assessment



- Tele-assessment is not the same thing as electronic or online administration (though it may incorporate the latter)

**Electronic administration** of instruments such as the WAIS requires both examiner and examinee be in the same location at the same time, each with a tablet

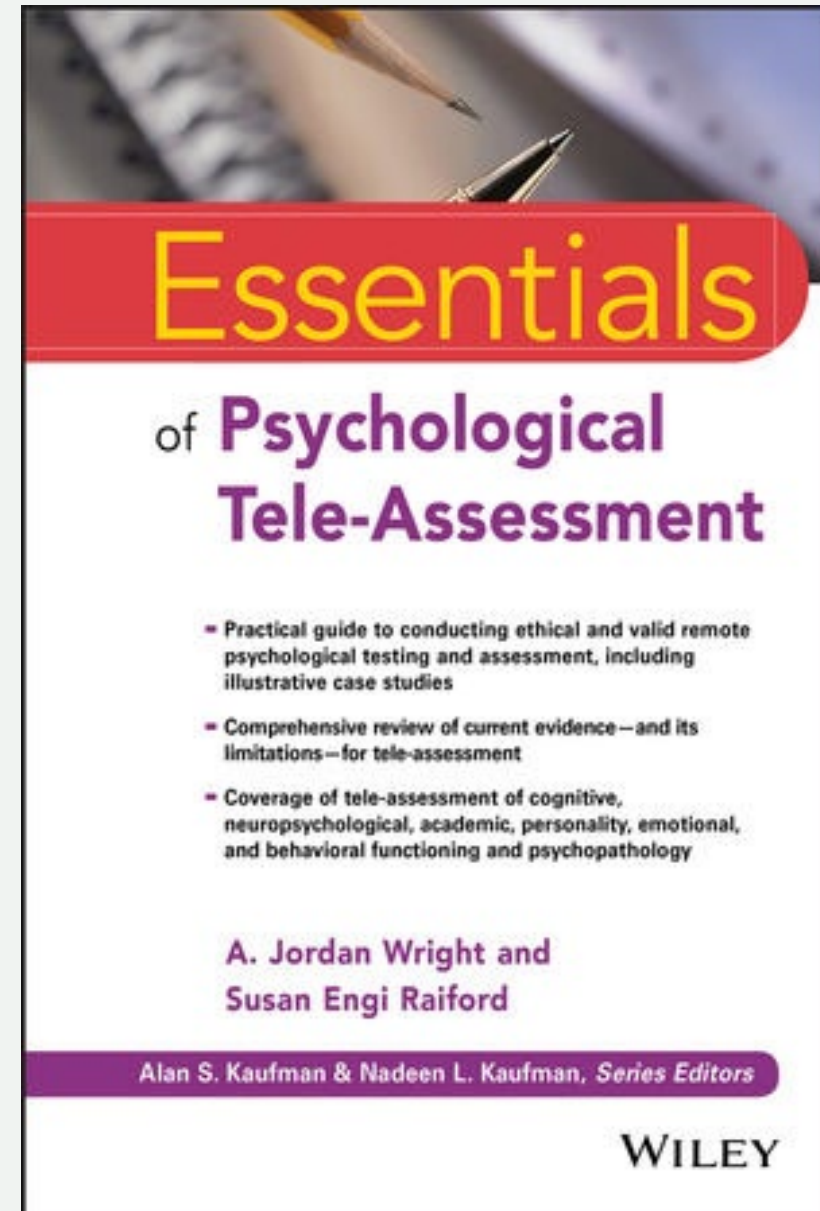
**Online administration** of instruments refers to the use of web-based platforms to administer survey or performance-based tests (in-person or via tele-assessment)

**Tele-assessment** is a particular type of *telehealth* service wherein meetings are conducted via webcam, and instruments are administered via:

- Webcam
- Screen-sharing and/or screen control-sharing
- May also include mailing some assessment materials to the client and having them mail back their completed booklets, and/or online administration



# Essentials of Psychological Tele- Assessment





# Preliminary APA Guidance Principles

← → ↻ apaservices.org/practice/reimbursement/health-codes/testing/tele-assessment-covid-19



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## Guidance on psychological tele-assessment during the COVID-19 crisis

By A. Jordan Wright, PhD, Joni L. Mihura, PhD, Hadas Pade, PsyD, and David M. McCord

Last updated: May 1, 2020

Date created: April 3, 2020

12 min read

[CONTACT APA SERVICES](#)



# Principle 1: Do Not Jeopardize Test Security

**APA Ethical Standard 9.11: Psychologists must make reasonable efforts to maintain the integrity and security of test materials and other assessment techniques consistent with law and contractual obligations, and in a manner that permits adherence to the ethics code.**

*Note: Initial principles advised against sending materials to clients without test publisher approval, but this has since become standard practice with the support of test publishers.*





## Principle 2: Do the Best You Can With What Is Actually Available To You (Mindfully and Ethically)

**Higher standards for this now – no longer an emergency situation, but a mindful practice!**

- Adequate Wi-Fi
- Adequate tests and materials
- Accommodations for clients
- Keep procedures as close to in-person procedures as possible
- Audio-visual monitoring of remote assessment is *absolutely vital*

# Principle 3: Be Rigorously Mindful of Data Quality

**Better research on method equivalence now than at the very beginning of the pandemic.**

- Crucial to understand the nature of the assessment tasks and think critically about how method of administration may impact them





## Principle 4: Think Critically About Test and Subtest Substitutions

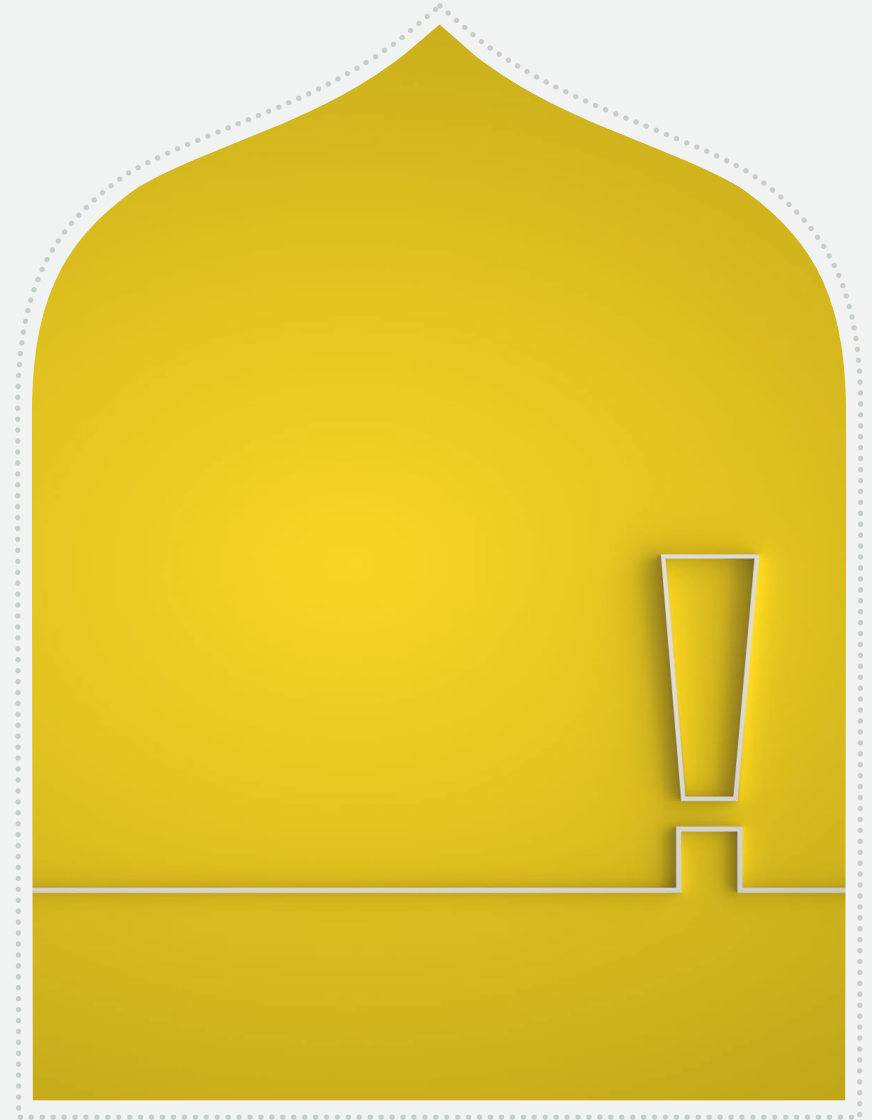
**Many test publishers offer specific recommendations for substitutions now**

- Do you need all subtest scores?
- What is the guidance?

# Principle 5: Widen “Confidence Intervals” When Making Conclusions and Clinical Decisions

## Essentially, expand margin of error

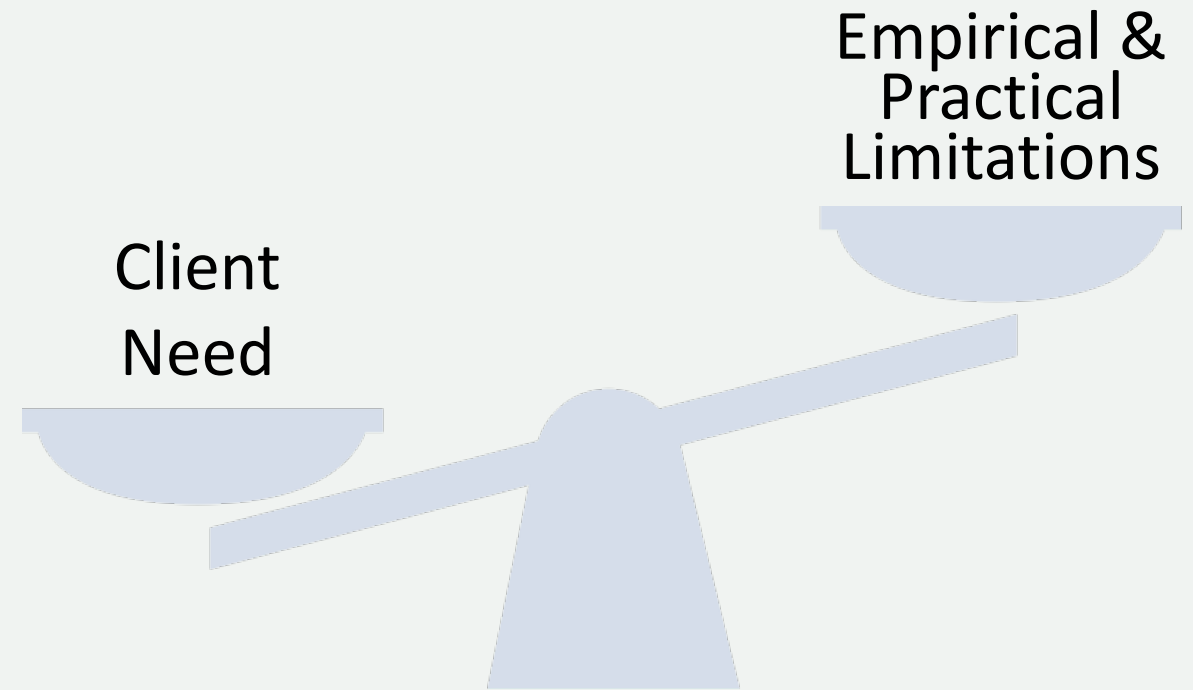
- “It is important to remember that cognitive and other psychological test data are proxies for underlying abilities, traits, states, and functioning. No test score has ever, with 100% accuracy, explained an underlying trait perfectly.” (APA Principles)
- Practically speaking: Use 90% CI instead of 95% CI





## Principle 6: Maintain the Same Ethical Standards of Care As In Traditional Psychological Assessment Services

- Informed consent
- Scope of competence
- Issues of equity and inequity
- Client appropriateness
- Transparency



### AERA, APA, & NCME (2014) “*Standards*”:

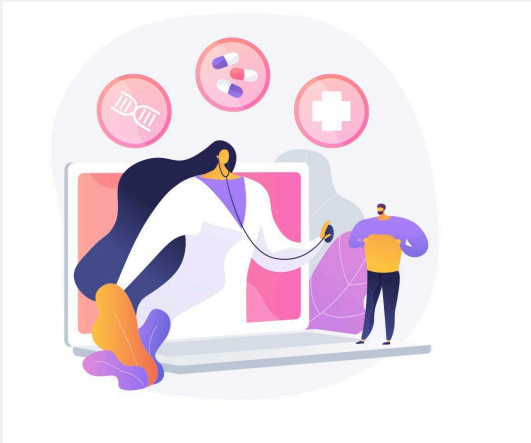
Minor changes in standardized administration are allowed, if we can reasonably assume they wouldn't alter the data that emerge significantly.

# Scope of Competence

- Competent in *assessment*
- Competent with the *technology*
- Competent at ***doing assessment using the technology***



# Maintaining Testing and Ethical Standards



- Tele-assessment requires its own set of skills **built upon a foundation of basic psychological assessment skills**
- It also requires much more due diligence regarding the **testing conditions** for both examiner and examinee

# Ethical Considerations

- Maintaining the same ethical standards as in traditional psychological assessment
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Maintaining test security
- Maintaining testing standards



# Maintaining Testing and Basic Ethical Standards: Examiner's Preparation

1. Is your space private, quiet, well-lit, and without external distractions?
2. Is your Wi-Fi connection strong and stable?
3. Are you able to maintain complete privacy and client confidentiality?
4. Do you have access to all of the testing materials and technologies you need?
  - E.g., Zoom versus SimplePractice
5. Do you have a contingency plan for technology glitches?





## Maintaining Testing and Basic Ethical Standards: Examiner Preparation

6. Have you tested your eye gaze angle and lighting?
7. Remove distracting items (especially personal items) from background
8. Have you practiced administering the tests you will use specifically by telehealth?
9. Are you familiar with the research and the guidance on tele-administration for the tests you will be using?



# Maintaining Testing and Basic Ethical Standards: Client Preparation

## Develop a Safety Plan

- Know their location
- Know the local resources, including/especially emergency resources
- Have contact information for a friend or relative



# Maintaining Testing and Basic Ethical Standards: Client Preparation

## Instruct them on their physical space

- We carefully curate the assessment space in person – don't take this for granted!
- 1. Relatively free from distraction
- 2. Comfortable and private
- 3. Schedule at a time with lower likelihood of interruptions, greater likelihood of uncompromised privacy
- 4. Situated at a desk or table
- 5. Use headphones or earbuds
- 6. Some tests require use of an external mouse
- 7. **No recording of sessions**
- 8. Communicate the plan in the event of technology failures





## Maintaining Testing and Basic Ethical Standards: Client Preparation

**Instruct them on their computer - "Tech Check" session great when possible!**

1. Ensure adequately-sized screen (NO mobile devices or tablets except for peripheral camera!)
2. Close all other programs
3. Turn off notifications and alarms
4. Set up peripheral camera (mobile device or tablet)
5. Ensure headphones or earbuds working properly
6. Ensure web browser compatibility when applicable

# Maintaining Testing and Basic Ethical Standards: Client Preparation

## Instruct them on their environment

1. Animals out of the room if/when possible
2. Adequate lighting
3. Have testing materials nearby but set aside
4. Have water, a snack

Also: No vaping during testing....



# Maintaining Testing and Basic Ethical Standards: During Session



1. Continuously monitor the client's environment
2. Continuously attend to the necessary conditions and rules
3. Be explicit about how to use test materials
4. Be ready to contact publisher/platform tech support if needed
5. Test limits and follow up on responses liberally
6. Monitor fatigue and shorten sessions as needed
7. Be ready to switch tasks/contingency plan

# From my email template

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Tele-assessment is a bit of a unique process, and has certain technological requirements in order to meet standards that allow tele-assessment to be equivalent in quality to in-person assessment. Specifically, for our testing sessions, you need access to **stable, high-speed internet; a private, well-sit space in which to meet; a laptop with a webcam and an additional camera such as a cellphone; an external mouse (not a just laptop trackpad [only for some sessions]); external headphones; and a flat surface at which to sit and work (e.g., a desk or table)**. Please let me know if any of these are a concern.



# A Typical Assessment

Unsurprisingly, most people contact me for ADHD assessment (and, increasingly, ASD)

Average battery includes:

- WAIS-IV (or Woodcock Johnson Test of Cognitive Abilities)
- WIAT-4 (or Woodcock John Test of Achievement)
- MMPI-3 (or MMPI-A-RF)
- MCMI-IV (or MACI)
- SCL-90-R
- TSI (Trauma Symptom Inventory)
- IVA-2
- Computerized Wisconsin Cart Sort (WCST)

# Other Tests I've Used Recently

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Wechsler Memory Scale	Eating Disorder Inventory	Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children	Career Assessment Inventory	Working Styles Assessment
NEO-PI-3	Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory	BASC-3	ABAS-3	Adapted MOCA
Oral Tests of Trailmaking	Adult Asperger Assessment (AAA)	Ritvo Autism Asperger Diagnostic Scale-Revised (RAADS-R)	Structured Interview for Prodromal Syndromes (SIPS/SOPS)	Monteiro Interview Guidelines for Diagnosing the Autism Spectrum (MIGDAS-2)



# Typical Tele-Assessment Process

- Initial phone call to orient client, including all tech requirements
- Mail materials to client in advance
- Intake/Clinical interview (one to two sessions)
  - Also serves as a “tech check”
  - Select and email self-report inventories after this session (via online portals)
- On average, two testing sessions (one four hour, one three hour)
  - Session 1: Cognitive and Achievement
  - Session 2: IVA-2, WCST, remaining cognitive or achievement
  - Send questionnaires via links
- Feedback session

# Client Appropriateness

## Must be considered critically

- Level of risk
- Technological literacy and competency
- Technological access
- Technological comfort
- Accepting of the modality
- Clinical and cognitive factors



# First, Do No Harm

1. The assessment must be valid
  - Commensurate with research, best practices
2. Online privacy and security must be prioritized
3. Must not provide knowingly inadequate services
4. Ensure consent is fully informed, including limitations and alternatives
5. Verify client identity





# Protect Integrity of the Process

1. Take steps to ensure client does not access materials ahead of time
2. Take steps to ensure no cheating





# Administering Tests Virtually

- Requires access to virtual materials, ideally for multiple tests
  - What happens if you only have Pearson QGlobal, and your WAIS gets spoiled?
- Realistically requires multiple vendors, but thankfully most are pay-per-use rather than subscription (or at least have the option)
- I most commonly use:
  - Pearson QGlobal (WAIS, WIAT, MMPI, Millon, SCL90R, BASC, and others)
  - PARiConnect (WCST, TSI/TSCC, EDI, NEO, PAI, others)
  - IVA-2 (its own vendor, BrainTrain)
  - WPS for ABAS (and others)
  - Riverside (Woodcock Johnson system)\*



# Administering Tests Virtually: Pearson Products

- Comprehensive tele-assessment practice guides, generally and for specific tests
- Available online for free:  
<https://www.pearsonassessments.com/professional-assessments/digital-solutions/telepractice/about.html>

Staying connected through telepractice

News & how-tos including COVID-19 resources

About Products Resources Newsroom

Product information Product list

## Product-specific information

Pearson has a growing number of products that may be appropriately used for telepractice under certain conditions. Please keep in mind that local laws and regulations apply and must be considered first in each case. Any specific guidance available for a given test can be found below. If you don't see information on a particular product, please [contact us](#) for assistance.

If you recently purchased digital assets for one of our assessment products, each asset must be allocated to your user account by your Q-global Account Owner or an Account Administrator. Once it is allocated, the end user can locate this digital asset in the restricted folder for that assessment in the Resource Library. [More information found here.](#)

## Product list

Clinical Assessments Questionnaires Interventions

# Administering Tests Virtually: Pearson Products

- Conducting tele-assessment will require acquiring digital assets

The screenshot displays the Pearson Digital Assessment Library Account interface. The top navigation bar includes the Pearson logo, the user name 'MELANIE WILCOX', and the affiliation 'Augusta University'. The main content area is titled 'Resource Library' and lists various assessment products. A red circle highlights a folder named 'Restricted', which contains several PDF files related to the WAIS-IV Q-global test, including the Administration and Scoring Manual, Response Booklets, Stimulus Books, and the Technical and Interpretive Manual.

PEARSON ALWAYS LEARNING

Home MELANIE WILCOX | Augusta University | My Account | Manage Accounts | Resource Library | Notifications | Feedback | Help | Sign Out

DIGITAL ASSESSMENT LIBRARY ACCOUNT

« Back

**Resource Library**

- Quickview
- RBANS Update
- Ravens2
- SCL-90-R
- SSIS SEL Edition
- TFLS
- Vineland-3
- WAIS-IV
- Restricted
  - WAIS-IV Q-global Administration and Scoring Manual.pdf
  - WAIS-IV Q-global Response Booklet 1.pdf
  - WAIS-IV Q-global Response Booklet 2.pdf
  - WAIS-IV Q-global Stimulus Book 1.pdf
  - WAIS-IV Q-global Stimulus Book 2.pdf
  - WAIS-IV Q-global Technical and Interpretive Manual.pdf
- WIAT
- WIAT-4 Dvsn

# Administering Tests

## Virtually: Others

- Can administer the Wisconsin Cart Sort *online* via PAR ([www.pariconnect.com](http://www.pariconnect.com))
- Only continuous performance test with empirical support that is currently available for remote testing is the IVA-2
  - Computer application based; client is sent a link and takes it on their computer remotely

## **YOU MUST ABSOLUTELY MONITOR THESE CLOSELY**

- PAR also has a number of great self-report measures including the PAI, TSI-2/TSCC/TSCYC, EDI-2
- Online self-report instruments also available through Pearson, MHS, and others



# Example: Tele-Admin of the WAIS

Three options:

1. Send all materials, including blocks
2. Send response booklets but not blocks
3. Send no materials





# A Note On Sending Materials

**We are ethically obligated to do everything in our power to protect the integrity of the materials**

- Double-envelope to help ensure the client does not access the materials until needed during testing
- Have them open the envelopes on camera
- Include an already-addressed-and-paid-for envelope for materials to come straight back to you
- Include pencils without erasers
- If you do not have an office address, use a P.O. Box





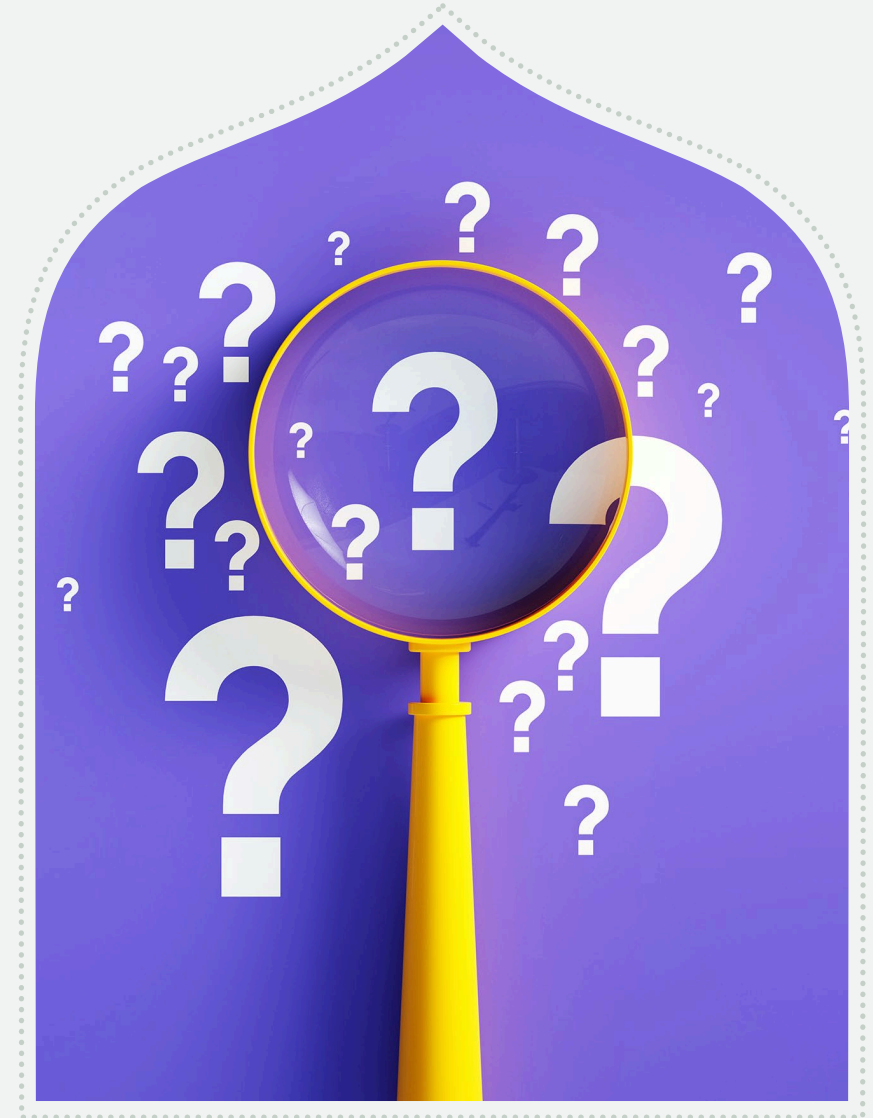
# So! You Want to Practice Tele-Assessment

Questions to begin with:

- Are you already trained in assessment?
- How comfortable are you with technology?
- What, if any, assessment assets do you already have?
- What presenting concerns do you typically assess for (or do you want to assess for), and how appropriate are they for tele-assessment?

# So! You Want to Practice Tele-Assessment

- If not already trained in assessment in general, need to seek out this additional training
- If already trained in assessment
  - Begin with those assessments you already know well
  - Seek consultation and/or opportunities to practice administering them by telehealth per the available guidance and empirical literature on the tele-administration of those tests
- Purchase the digital asset resources and/or platform access needed to both practice and administer
  - Purchases will depend on what you already have, e.g., if you own physical manuals, already have response booklets





## So! You Want to Practice Tele-Assessment

- Ensure that your physical space (whether home office or otherwise) is appropriate for tele-assessment (privacy, silence, lighting, wi-fi)
- Ensure that you have access to needed (and, when possible, helpful) technology
- Set up a separate profile on your laptop for testing days, especially when you have to share screen and screen control
- If you do not have a separate office address, set up a post office box to send and receive testing materials

**Consult, Consult, Consult!**



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# Questions?

## Thank you!