Many of us no longer need to go to the grocery store to buy food, the bank to make a transaction, or the library to check out a book. These kinds of tasks can be done online wherever we are.

Caring, confidential, face-to-face counseling is also just a few mouse clicks away, provided at no cost to you through The Village Employee Assistance Program.

Web-based therapy is growing in popularity, and research shows that for many mental health issues, it is as effective as in-person sessions. These online services may be especially helpful for those who face barriers getting to a counselor’s office, such as distance, disability or busy schedules.

Some people may simply prefer the convenience of online counseling, such as not having to leave work and drive to an appointment, or the privacy of connecting with a therapist from their own home.

Online communication may be more comfortable for some users, especially younger adults, while others may prefer to meet in person. In some cases, an online appointment can be a “first step” in a therapy journey, or a complement to in-office sessions.

“Not every single issue is appropriate to do online, but it’s really a great experience for a lot of people,” says Katie Figuerres, an EAP counselor with The Village.
WHAT IS AN ONLINE SESSION LIKE?

When a client signs up for a web-based counseling session, they’ll receive paperwork explaining how to set up their account, as well as troubleshooting tips. They’ll get an email from the counselor confirming the online appointment. When the session starts, Figuerres makes sure her client’s microphone and speakers are working, and can talk through any technical glitches via instant messenger.

“It’s like a private meeting,” she says. “No one else is joining in on it.”

Figuerres minimizes distractions in her office that clients could see on their screen, such as glare. As clients talk, she focuses on their facial expressions and voice inflections.

She says it’s common for people to feel a bit “weird” about talking to a counselor through a computer, but those concerns diminish with time.

“It can seem impersonal at first, but I’ve found that as I get to know the client and the client gets to know me, the more personable it feels,” she says. “We still have that therapeutic connection. It’s the same whether it’s in person or online. It’s just we have a medium that we’re going through.”

Village EAP counselors receive specialty training on how to provide online counseling services, including the rules, ethical issues, and best practices.

Options for online counseling have increased greatly in recent years, and not all are created equal. The American Psychological Association says it’s important to make sure your online therapist is licensed in the state where you live. You also want to make sure the website you access services through is secure. At a minimum, it should be HIPAA-compliant and have the ability to verify your identity and your therapist’s identity, the APA says.

Through The Village Employee Assistance Program, you can schedule secure online counseling sessions with a licensed EAP counselor at no cost to you. To access these services, call 1-800-627-8220.

WORRIED ABOUT DEBT?

We can help! Financial counseling is part of your EAP. Call 1-800-627-8220 for more info.