

Therapy in the Time of Covid-19

During Week-1 of the shut-down, emails started piling up on the clinical social work list serve with countless questions about virtual platforms: who uses Doxy.me? Who likes Spruce? Which one is the most affordable? Will the various Boards that govern our practices allow us to be paid for working virtually? What about payment? Is Venmo secure? What about PayPal? Luckily, by the end of the week, most clinicians in the larger community were finding their way and of course being helpful to one another.

The reality is, I've been completely dependent on our practice management and all the admin staff that clients typically see when they come to our offices for therapy. The speed and efficiency with which our practice transitioned to Zoom is nothing short of awe-inspiring. Of course some clinicians – as well as many clients – are more accustomed to virtual technology than others. It was a client who explained the “gallery format” to me that allows everyone in a Zoom group to see and hear everyone else! For someone like me who remembers when correcting typewriters were cutting edge, becoming adept at using Zoom has been surprisingly gratifying.

But what about the actual content of the therapy sessions? How do we sense the mood in the room when the rooms are separated by miles and only visible on a screen? I've found this aspect of the experience to be the most rewarding – and surprising. When we first started discussing the plan to go virtual, a colleague of mine and I were probably among the most skeptical, both of us adhering to a more analytical, long-term, deep-dive approach to therapy than other more solution-focused models that may seem more adaptable to technology. For most clients – and therapists – it seems the inhibitions we feared would be a barrier, the awkwardness of distance versus face-to-face have melted away and the work of self-reflection, understanding, exploration and healing are continuing uninterrupted.

It's true that for some, the shift from in-person therapy to virtual has been difficult, just as the edict to stay home has been more difficult for some than others. For people who naturally enjoy alone time or quiet time at home, or for those who typically work from home anyway, the current situation is easier to manage. For those who rely heavily on external sources of enjoyment and self-care, having the gym and restaurants all closed is more difficult. I believe all of us are struggling to find a way to connect with others while having to keep our “social distance.” I'm grateful that I can still do the work I love and “see” my clients, as well as some of their cats and dogs.

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