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Conducting Online Therapy Sessions

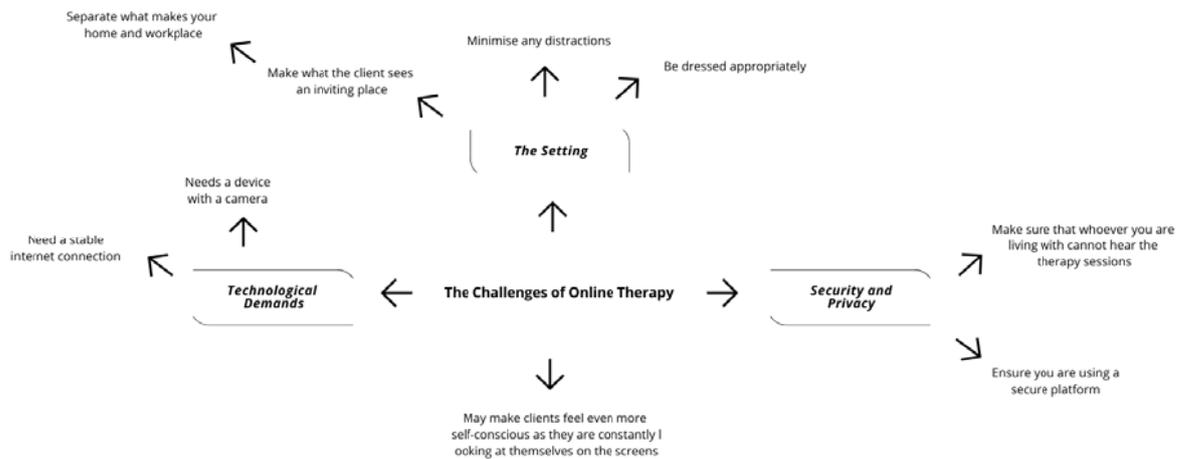
This document is transcribed from a webinar by Christiane Sanderson. It outlines the challenges which therapists may be faced with when delivering online therapy sessions and how this can be tackled to ensure that the online therapy delivers results.

Challenges from Social Distancing

- Therapist and client share anxieties of the impact of lockdown
- Spare time has led many to start to question their values and life

Moving to Online

- Working online can just be as effective as to working face to face
- The future may keep online therapy. Many clients benefit from it as they may struggle to go to face to face therapy due to social anxiety or because of time and distance



Shift in Power Dynamic

- Both client and therapist have anxieties surrounding COVID-19 and thus power is equally shared in this respect
- As a therapist you are unable to control the surrounding the client is in and what the client may do in the session e.g., Drinking/smoking etc.

Lockdown Impact on the Client

- Overthinking
- No purpose or meaning (when does it end?)

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- Fear of unknown/death
- Bodies under pressure (overeating/ bad sleeping patterns/ lack of movement)
- No real structures in days which can get a client into a depressive state
- Lack of touch
- Huge emotional dysregulation
- Been controlled to what they can and cannot do
- Trust issues (government)
- Seeing others being productive and picking up hobbies can increase vulnerability to shame if they are not being as productive
- Re-entry anxiety with jobs and relationships

Impact and Challenges for Practitioner

- Screen fatigue (more cognitive demands)
- Lack of visual cues
- Manage presence of family members (confidentiality)
- May feel isolated/disconnected
- Own anxieties to manage to not contaminate the clients
- How do sessions end with the client? Need to negotiate this

Pacing and Dosing

- Managing the frequency and duration of sessions
- Texting can be beneficial for many clients- short texts several times a week to check in, a rhetorical or short message exchanges
- Challenging those 50 minutes (can be too long or too short) breaking it up into the week instead. Is the 50 minutes for the therapist or client?
- Pace the therapeutic session, when to put on the accelerator or the brakes

Non-verbal Communication

- Fatiguing as the lack of physical presence means there is a demand to focus more
- Tone, rhythm, and tempo of voice and noticing any changes
- Facial expressions, holding of breath, eye contact
- Reflect any changes to the client and letting them comment on them if they can
- Be aware of our own body language
- If client is talking fast paced, then as a therapist talk at a slow pace to help bring down the client's internal state

Find creative ways to help focus the client on the here and now...

- **Mindfulness/Meditation/ Yoga** (To be cautious with trauma patients as they tend to be scared to 'go into their own body'. Use shorter times in this state and try making sure they keep their eyes open)
- **Keeping hands busy**
- **Distractions** (puzzles/instruments etc.)
- **A safe place they can go to** (this could be a real or imaginative place)
- **Song/ Poem**

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- **Mood box/basket** (an item in there which they can see/taste/touch/hear)
- **Cookie jar of achievements** (no achievement is too small to be written down on a piece of paper and put in the jar, whenever the client needs an affirmation, they can pick one up which is personal to them)