

Play Telehealth for Coronavirus

By Julia Knach, LCPC, LCADC, RPT-S, CCTP, CCDP, CFTP, CATP

As a trauma therapist, one of the most important things in counseling is being with the client as they are going through their trauma work. Since the start of the Coronavirus, therapists alike, have been flocking to online telehealth. Telehealth has been around for several years before the pandemic, and clinicians using telehealth will state that it's just as effective as in person counseling. For those of us that are used to in person counseling, the sudden and drastic change in counseling styles can prove to be anxiety provoking for even the most experienced of counselors. In struggling to maintain some bit of normalcy with client's, there are some things that I have found to be helpful when switching to telehealth.

The first telehealth session should be done with the caregivers. This will help set up expectations, boundaries, and options for setting up reward systems and family time. This session will include the limits to telehealth confidentiality and privacy concerns. This first session is very important to re-engage families and normalize the experiences that the families are going through. You will want to discuss the level of caregiver involvement and how the caregiver can prepare the child for the first session. Some caregivers may be resistant to teletherapy, and this is okay. You can explore this with them and try to determine if shorter sessions would be easier/more appropriate.

Once the first session with the parents is over, the next step is to prepare for doing sessions with your client. If you're like me, you have probably thought: where do I begin, how do I engage children over the computer, what counseling tools will I be able to provide these children? I have put together my top favorite activities that I have been doing so far and will share them with you. At the end, I provide you all with some references and places to gather more tips and techniques. Please remember, there have been counselors doing this way before the pandemic and have put together resources for us

newbies to use to help us transition!

Here are some techniques to use and explanations on how to use them via telehealth.

Techniques:

1) Superheroes Save the Day:

- a. **This uses superheroes (real or the child can make one up) to fight or protect the child from coronavirus or anything the child may need protection from. You can use superheroes the children have or create some with them. Once you have the superheroes, you can now act out the mission. The child can instruct you on the mission and how to act it out with them, or the child can act out the mission all by themselves.**

2) Simon-says

- a. **This uses the old game of Simon-says to help regulate children and stay in touch with how their body is acting/feeling. You can go first in instructing the child what Simon says. Keep the activities and motions for above the waist, that way you can maintain eye contact with the child. After you are Simon, it is the child's turn and you are the participant.**

3) Show and Tell

- a. **This one will need preparation before the session. You can contact the caregivers and instruct them to have the child pick out their favorite toy, favorite stuffed animal, favorite place in the house, and safest place in the house. During the session, you will have the child show and tell you about each item. You can ask processing questions such as what makes them their favorite items, what makes them feel safe in this place?**

4) Scavenger Hunt

- a. This one will need communication with the caregiver beforehand as well. You can email or call them with the list. Have the caregivers use a timer to see how long it takes clients to find each item. Depending on length of time to find all the items, caregivers can come up with possible rewards (i.e. family game night, movie night, spa day with mom). The list of items should be more descriptive than actual items (i.e. 2 things that are round, 1 thing that is orange, 2 things that are soft, 1 thing that is blue and green).

During the session, you would have the client describe how they found everything and any challenges they had in finding all the items. You could discuss what the reward was that they got and what made that a reward for them.

5) Princess Party Time

- a. This can be done in two sessions and will need the help of their caregivers. The first session you will discuss the idea of having a princess party and what you would be celebrating (i.e. the end of coronavirus, a birthday party). You would discuss what you would buy as a gift, what you would bring to eat, who would be allowed to come to the party, and what you would wear to the party.
- b. The second session would be the actual party. Both you and the client would dress up, bring real or fake food, and use stuffed animals for other guests. You could discuss what was so hard about having to stay in to have the party, what was fun about the party, what do they miss from having real parties, and what are they looking forward to most when they are allowed to see their friends and have real parties?

6) Earth- Day Celebration/ Recycling Party

- a. This would be set up the session before with the client. At the end of the previous session, inform the client that they will be making a project out of recycled material

8) Imagine you're a dragon/fairy

a. This is a script for guided imagery to help the client relax and can be used for regulation. The following script is long and can be broken apart as judgement of clinician. Feel free to add in deep breaths at any point you feel the client might need them:

- i.** Let's stretch our bodies out. Sit comfortably with your body relaxed. Imagine you are a dragon/fairy who lives up high in the North. You like cold weather and snow. Now lift your arms and move your arms around like the cold winds of the north during snowstorms. Let's fly in the blizzard, move your arms up and down as though you were flying. Don't forget to taste some of the snow with your tongue.
- ii.** Now you're a dragon/fairy who lives in the East. You love to swim in the ocean and play in the waves. Breathe in and lift your arms to your waist. Now move your arms around like swimming and jumping through the waves. Now pretend you are the waves and move your arms like waves.
- iii.** Now imagine you're a dragon/fairy who lives down South. You like warm weather and sunshine. Breathe in and lift your arms high with your palms facing up. Put your face up and feel the sun on your face. Feel the sun warming up your whole body and notice how you are relaxed.
- iv.** Now imagine you're a dragon/fairy flying to California or Hawaii. Stretch up like the palm trees and move side to side like the branches blowing in the wind. Shake your limbs out and get ready to fly to the Midwest. You land in open corn fields. Bend over and pretend to eat some corn. Stretch your fingers as far as they can go and prepare to take flight again. Now you've landed in the Rocky

Mountains. The landing pad was on a snowy mountain. You see the tallest mountain and get set to fly to it. Ready, set, GO!! Take off to the highest mountain top. Look at the beautiful view and breathe in the fresh air.

- v. Now imagine you've landed in the desert in the middle of the night. The weather is nice and cool. You must give yourself butterfly hugs to stay warm. You stay awake all night to see the sun rise. Lift your arms and breathe in the open skies and giant clouds. Now it's time to go back home. Get ready and take flight again! Now you've landed back home, stretch your wings and relax.

9) I copy- you copy

- a. **This involves coping movements as the leader and then as the participant. To start you will do movements and the client will copy you. Make sure you keep the movements to the upper body area so the client can see. After a few rounds, the client will lead, and you will follow their movements.**

10) I Spy

- a. **This game has been around for a while and can be adapted to telehealth. You can go first and find something in the client's room that you can see. You will then say "I spy something..." and the client will attempt to guess the item. You can give them a limited number of guesses. Once they have guessed or you share what the item was, explain what made you pick that item and how that item makes you feel. Once your turn is done, the client can then go. You can have the client explain what made them pick that item in your place and how it makes them feel.**

11) Feelings charades

- a. **This is a fun way for clients to see how their bodies respond to certain emotions. You will start and you will pick out an emotion and act out that emotion. The client will**

attempt to guess that emotion. Once the emotion has been guessed, you can then discuss with the client when you felt that way last and how you responded to that emotion. The client would then share their last experience with that emotion.

Some other options are to read a book with the client and discuss the book, watching videos such as Sesame Street, or having the client create their own stories using puppets they made. There are several websites and YouTube channels that are offering session advice for therapists as well. Some of these individuals include Liana Lowenstein, Lynn Louise Wonders, Tammi Van Hollander, Dr. Jessica Stone, and Rachel Alvtar just to name a few.

I hope this information helps and would love to hear more about your experiences and interventions that you all have used and are finding useful!!

Be well and stay safe!

Julia K

Manager of Clinical Services at Baltimore Child Abuse Center