

Cyberwork

Can we create certainty in an uncertain world?

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One lesson the pandemic has taught us is that we can successfully meet the challenges of change in an uncertain world.

Uncertainty remains a dominant theme in the anxieties and concerns that clients bring to therapy. As therapists, we have had a closer affinity with our clients' feelings and experiences and together, we have instinctively sought certainty, security and safety.

Creating choices

Meeting their counsellor online has helped some clients to feel a greater degree of certainty in the development of their therapeutic relationships. Having more choice over where and how they meet (within the confines of the media offered), creates an environment where clients can feel safer to disclose and explore their painful experiences or vulnerable sides. The client shielding or fearful of physical contact has been able to access counselling safely to support them in dealing with these fears. The client struggling with the demands of family life and working from home has been able to carve out the precious time for counselling, without having to find the additional time for travel. When we were all in lockdown for so many weeks at a time, clients were still able to engage in counselling and all the support that it offered.

Conversely, counsellors may have found that working online felt intrusive, if they were used to working from an office, with clients suddenly coming into their personal space. Counsellors found once-familiar processes and procedures rapidly changing to meet the new situation and ways of meeting

clients. Now, many of us are dealing with new uncertainties as we have returned to our physical workplaces, often blending our time between there and home working.

While there is much talk of 'the new normal', we know that the pandemic is not over. So, how do we find or create certainty in such an uncertain world? Of course, it's natural for humans to focus on what we don't know and what we are fearful of – which creates further uncertainty and perpetuates a cycle of anxiety and sense of helplessness.

Creativity in our rooms

Online counselling can support us in our search for certainty, giving us a degree of power and security over both our work and our personal lives. As the client has the choice over where they meet their counsellor, so the counsellor has come to have more choice over their environment. As therapists, we have been able to be creative with our counselling space at home, experimenting with the layout and décor to design somewhere more personal and comfortable than a generic counselling room, often shared with others. This personalisation has the additional effect of supporting us to access our self-care, giving us more control and certainty in this aspect of our daily lives.

In the last 18 months, my home counselling space has evolved to incorporate a waterfall feature, a diffuser and a range of room sprays and essential oil roller balls. With the diffuser in the background (lavender is my choice of oil) and the waterfall switched on, I do a short, five-minute meditation in between clients, and I feel that I have more control over my space, enabling me to successfully manage my stress. I feel more grounded and present for my next client and I notice the difference.

For those counsellors still relatively new to working online, the lack of, or limits to, seeing our clients created an initial uncertainty in how to fully 'meet' and engage with them. In addition, there was the need to gain more technical prowess and confidence in dealing with the effect of the inevitable technical glitches that arise. For some, these challenges led to a corresponding impact on their confidence, affecting their sense of certainty in their skills and ability to create meaningful therapeutic relationships.

Building confidence

However, as training was undertaken, and experience and skills in meeting clients at relational depth online developed, an accompanying certainty has grown. I'm sure that some readers will have found a natural affinity with one medium and perhaps surprised themselves in the process. A growing confidence connecting with clients online and responding to the inevitable technical difficulties will all increase our sense of certainty in our online counselling abilities.

A benefit of having to rapidly respond to change and an uncertain world, has been the recognition by many of us that we can successfully meet these challenges and focus on finding the certainties that create our sense of security and safety. We have learnt how it feels to have uncertainty all around us, developing a renewed and greater empathy for our clients' experiences of, and responses to, uncertainty. In the process of supporting them to identify the small certainties in their lives, to focus on what choices they *do* have, we have been able to engage in the same process. ●

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