

# The Effect of Lockdown on the Client and the Therapist

Who would have thought that at the beginning of March when lockdown started and we were all in a state of shock, that three months later we would all still be coming to terms with this global pandemic and its unknown implications for the future.

Rarely before, in over 20 years working as a therapist, have I felt so much similarity and connection with my clients as we all try and navigate around staying safe and well.

From 16 March I was forced to close down my consulting rooms and stay at home. My client caseload disappeared overnight. My clients equally lost their safe space and their regular weekly face-to-face sessions. There was no time to say goodbye or really process these enormous changes. The essential therapeutic alliance felt under threat.

I was apprehensive about working from home – something I had never done before – always appreciating the importance of placing the boundaries between my work and home life. I had so many questions. Which room was I going to work from? How would it work being in lockdown at home with a partner and family? Finding time and space might be challenging. My clients were experiencing the same anxieties and many finding they just had no space as a couple to have their sessions, as there was no privacy in their homes.

Whilst I have worked online with Skype for many years, I had to adjust to the new Zoom technology. Clients were initially not keen to work online saying they preferred to wait until we could meet face to face once more. As the weeks of lockdown continued however, clients tentatively adjusted to working virtually, often struggling with technology in ways that had never been asked of them before. It has been a steep learning curve to manage my own challenges whilst being alongside my clients with theirs. I have been amazed how my clients have shown so much resilience in shifting their regular face-to-face meetings to working virtually, even when finding it impossible to find a safe, secure place in their homes to have a session, and having to resort to their cars, or even an empty car park. This is on top of managing the impact of isolation, the anxiety of potential job losses, home schooling, fear of catching the virus and in some cases grieving for loved ones - to name just a few.

Thankfully, all of my clients in their own time have returned to working with me and new enquiries are increasing every week. Working online for me seems to have created a new intimacy, as clients invite me into their space as opposed to them coming into my consulting room. I chose a room where there are blank walls. They choose a room that says so much about them, a bare empty room, a room full of books and clutter, a bustling kitchen worktop or the intimacy of their bedroom, sharing with me parts of themselves that I would never have been part of in my consulting room. I now see things that were unavailable to me a few months ago. When clients come to see me straight from work, they are often dressed in corporate work wear. Now some come to sessions in their pyjamas!

Boundaries seem less rigid: having the family pet come and sit on the lap of a client, bringing in the baby who is crying, sitting with a cup of coffee or even a glass of wine, opening the front door for the supermarket delivery. These actions that were once discouraged and even disapproved of, now seem just part and parcel of our new interaction.

Initially therapy sessions changed. The work we had been doing for some time seemed inappropriate. Discussions were needed ranging from being anxious about where to buy food, how to home school and being separated from our loved ones - to the fear and dread of hearing the government's daily Covid reports with the escalating numbers of patients diagnosed and losing their lives. I found myself using words like 'challenging times', 'unknown feelings', 'stressful situations' frequently. Clients checked in with me as to how I was coping and it felt we were facing the same challenges at the same time and they looked to me for support and guidance.

Three months on, we have settled into a different way of being and working. I have to say that I am really enjoying working virtually, despite the testing technical difficulties at times. I have been amazed at the resilience and determination of my clients to continue working together. I've noticed that working virtually for many couples has brought easiness, a slowing down that gives more capacity for thinking. Perhaps it's merely the fact that not having to travel to a session has caused less stress. During this time I have had no cancelled sessions or requests for rescheduling. Clients who used to be frequently late for sessions are waiting on screen for me to connect.

Is it possible that having a screen in front of us brings just enough distance between us that it creates more safety for couples that they don't feel in face to face sessions? A husband who had an affair but was stuck in his shame found his voice, a female client who couldn't come to terms with her partner's attachment to his children, now shares her emotions.

Just this morning my inbox is bombarded with retail shops advertising they are opening for business and offering all kinds of enticement to get us back to old shopping habits as the governments tries to kick start the economy.

This made me think as we start to emerge from lockdown, what will I take away from the last three months and how will I move forward? Will I just go back to how I worked before, or does this unique time help me and my clients move forward with clearer ideas of how we want to live our lives?

I am still unsure about what the future brings, but what I do know is yes, I really miss seeing and being with my clients face-to-face and can't wait for that to restart. I also feel that working virtually for me has been a huge learning curve and I will want to continue that journey with any clients who want to accompany me.

If you would like to discuss things further or to make an appointment, you can call me on **07976 403741** or **(020) 8959 9528**. Alternatively, you can contact me by email: [dawn.kaffel@couplescounselling.com](mailto:dawn.kaffel@couplescounselling.com)

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