

Hello friends and colleagues:

I recently posted that I wanted to connect with you all in these stressful times. I thought I could visit your staff meetings or group gatherings on line and simply have a conversation about what's going on and how we are all doing.

I was prompted to make this offer when missing my husband and remembering his generous spirit. I remembered how he had acted in previous emergencies (usually climate related) in terms of picking up older folks, taking them to shop, or to doctor's appointments, going to hospitals to see if anyone needed a ride home. This was just who he was and I was missing him and wondering what he would do in the face of this invisible and dangerous stressor.

When I wondered what I could offer, I realized that I could give of myself: A supportive presence, a person who listens and understands being in the trenches and holding multiple demands at the same time.

I have now been in touch with over twenty people and the most pressing question seems to be about doing tele-health and what activities will engage children. In talking with people for the past two weeks, here is what I can pass along:

1. Remember that children are much more interested in technology than some of us are and they will be eager to meet on most platforms;
2. Being on line with children and their parents offers them novelty: Remember that novelty is exciting and most definitely can be viewed as a positive change and fill someone with curiosity;
3. Please remember that you will convey your fears and worries as well as your confidence and sense of adventure: Tell kids this is new for you, you might need their help and guidance, ask them to show you what they know and is of interest to them;
4. Most of us like to feel confident and competent. Right now, getting online can fill us with ambivalence and uncertainty...we might even feel inadequate, heaven forbid!! Showing a little vulnerability is not unusual; however, there are other things you can do;
5. PRACTICE on line with friends and family. Call folks using your platform and explore the features that are available to you. And if you have nieces, nephews, or neighbors' kids, why not do a practice run (especially if you're going to ask a client to participate in an activity);
6. Don't forget that you know your client already (unless you're doing intakes online), and you know what they like to play with, what their interests are, what makes them laugh and delight;
7. If you can get to your office and get a little basket full of "transitional objects" that the kids will recognize (a puppet, a picture, a toy), you can show it to them online or use it to engage their interest and participation;
8. Don't feel so much pressure to "do" something; try "being with" and exploring together "I wonder what this will be like," "I wonder what you and I will find to do that we like;"

9. Anticipate something positive: Many therapists are finding delightful surprises when doing online work, like the child who was more open and candid about past traumas because he felt the benefit of the added perceived distance and privacy;
10. If you're feeling at a loss for activities to do, or ways to engage children, think about how you greeted the child in your play therapy office...find ways to spark their interest or let them spark yours;
11. There are lots of activities that people are sharing on social media. Please look up the following individuals who are actively sharing resources. They all have websites and they are easy to find: Tammi van Hollander, Lynn Louise Wonders, and Lianna Lowenstein. In addition, there is a group online called Tele-Play Therapy. Don't forget to check out the Association for Play Therapy website. Their discussion page is full of ideas;
12. However, don't rush to find activities outside of yourself. Yes, they are there, but give yourself a moment to see what you can discover if you allow yourself to close your eyes and think about the relationship you have with the child, his or her strengths, vulnerabilities, resources, temperament, interests...and imagine yourself reaching out to them. Remember that you are still offering the same thing: Yourself and your respect and kindness.
13. Develop a rhythm to your online sessions: a greeting, a focal point, and a closure. The focal point might be new (given all the collective stress in the universe) or it might be something you were working on before. See what continuity you can provide and then see how the child is doing now.
14. If you are child-centered, you are in a great position to allow the child to show you his/her environment and to follow their lead in whatever they might want to do;
15. If you are feeling the need to guide or direct the session, prepare a list of things to try and see how it goes while remaining flexible to changes. Remember that children are by nature exploratory, playful, and sometimes provocative. Give them opportunities to express themselves in myriad ways.
16. Personally, I enjoy mirroring exercises and think they can be a good way to start. Showing each other your new environments might be interesting but remember to clear your space of too much personal information that might have unintended impact on your child clients. Just prepare what they will see and look around where they are.
17. Use props if needed. You're the biggest prop there is;
18. Trust that all your sessions will be unique;
19. It might be more tiring to do these sessions because you're "on" most of the time and there is a little added stress when not feeling 100% confident. Remember that your confidence will grow;
20. You have not changed, only the mechanism by which you are connecting. You will find each other online and it will be strangely comforting to see/be with each other in this new way;
21. If obstacles arise for you, do some problem-solving, consult, or try welcoming this new way of being in a new and different way.

Good luck everyone, I am here as a support system. Feel free to contact me at 202-257-2783 or [elianagil@me.com](mailto:elianagil@me.com) I have lots of dates set up and I'm looking forward to them.

