Making the Most of Online Therapy

By Christina Crowe, RP

At Dig A Little Deeper, Psychotherapy & Counselling, we are proud to offer a diverse team of psychotherapists and counsellors to support you and your family on your journey to better mental health and stronger relationships. Additionally, we also offer both in-person, and online psychotherapy. This article will provide a little more information about the advantages and potential disadvantages of online psychotherapy. We will also provide tips on how to get the most from the online option should that be your choice.

Many in our community live in rural areas where there aren't many mental health therapists available, or are sitting on yearlong waiting lists only to see someone for 5 or 6 sessions. Online therapy can bridge the gaps and make therapy available to those who need it, or who might otherwise not get it.

Our qualified mental health clinicians at DALD are expanding access and providing the benefits of treatment to our community - a sign of the positive social change technology brings.

Advantages to online therapy

Geography – a great option for those who live far from a therapist’s office, or a community where there are few clinicians. This is also a great option for those who travel for work – you might have a choice of therapists in your home city, but you’re rarely actually home.

Convenience – Online therapy is usually available at more customizable times, which you can do over your lunch hour, when the younger kids are napping, or while the older kids are at their evening activities.

Accessibility - for those with physical limitations, or limited mobility to get to in person appointments, online sessions eliminate the need to find a ride, or make arrangements on any ongoing basis for potentially difficult transportation.

Privacy / social stigma – there is data to suggest that clients might feel additional privacy, and as such are freer to bring more of themselves to each session. They can be reassured by the privacy of their own home, or if home is part of the issue, from the privacy of a quiet conference room.

New: When there is a pandemic and we all have to social distance! - there is no need to suffer alone. If you wondered about the benefits of therapy before, never a better time like the present to try it out.
Disadvantages with online therapy

**No crisis support** – Appointments must be arranged in advance and there is no guarantee that your therapist will have availability, or will be reachable, if you are in crisis. While many private psychotherapists outside of a hospital setting also do not provide crisis support, this is even more so if your therapist isn’t close geographically. (Caledon's crisis support services can be found by clicking [here](#)).

**Distractibility** - doing sessions online from home, your bedroom or your home office can be very convenient, but if you are easily distracted, also less effective. You'll have to take some intentional measures to ensure you limit outside distractions so you can focus on your session (which your therapist can help you do in session).

**Serious psychiatric issues** – online psychotherapy generally isn’t recommended for those with more serious, and uncontrolled or undertreated psychiatric issues, such as schizophrenia or dissociative disorders. Controlled psychiatric disorders such as bipolar disorder can potentially be supported online as part of maintenance psychotherapy and should be discussed as part of a shared care plan with your doctor.

**Technology issues** – It’s a bit of a bummer when technology issues prevent the session from continuing. The cause is almost always due to spotty internet / wi-fi connections (occasionally dead batteries). Many people have access to smartphones these days, which is the easiest way to connect, given that mic and speaker access are already available by default. Ensure you have a solid wi-fi (or hard plug-in) connection before you start.

If you have decided that trying online therapy might be for you, here are a few tips to **make the most of your sessions**.

**Bring and take notes!** Have your main issues or symptoms from in-between sessions written down so that you don't forget to bring them up. Write down the things during or at the end of the session that you want to remember.

**Schedule your sessions at a good time.** Make sure you have a good internet connection, and you won’t be interrupted. Don’t hesitate to go back and forth on appointment times for you – the whole point is for your convenience.

**Choose your therapist carefully!** Making sure we are a good "fit" is very important, so don't keep seeing someone if you don't like them. Research shows that regardless of what type of therapy occurs, the best predictor of success depends on the relationship you develop with your therapist.

**Think about the goals you want to achieve.** This not only keeps you and your therapist on track, but it can even remind you of how far you have come.
**Prepare to be open.** Say what’s on your mind. I know this sounds really hard, but holding back in therapy only slows your progress. If you don’t feel like you can talk to your therapist, they may not be the right fit. Make sure you feel okay opening up a bit and even talking about your thoughts on the therapy process itself.

**Prepare to do some work.** In therapy we will often give you some things to try in between sessions, listen to or read. It’s important to practice new skills and create new experiences in your relationships and daily life. We can assess what’s helping versus what’s not, and move you closer to your goals.

**Turn off your other apps / programs!** Yes, your therapist can tell that you are reading an incoming message, email or otherwise getting distracted. We all struggle to disconnect sometimes, but this is dedicated time for you – it really does require your full attention. Turn off your notifications on your phone or laptop, so you aren't distracted, and the wi-fi doesn't glitch. Turn off notifications on a Mac, or on a PC/Windows, on your iPhone, or on an Android device. Do a speed test if you are concerned about the strength of your wi-fi connection. Google "speed test" from wherever you are, with your device’s internet browser.

**A couple of other important considerations:**

Ensure the therapist you choose is properly credentialed and has expertise in the issue you need support with.

Ensure that they are using a secure online platform. In Canada, online psychotherapy should be delivered using a HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) and PIPEDA (Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act) compliant platform. At Dig A Little Deeper, we use Doxy.me (like Doc see me), which is compliant. We take privacy and security very seriously. Doxy.me provides state of the art security and encryption protocols to assure that your data privacy is maintained.

To learn more about the Doxy.me platform, click here.

If you aren’t sure if online therapy is for you, you can check out the environment we use by clicking here, and also watch a very short youtube video below.

While it can be a bit nerve-racking to try something new, especially with something as important as your health – as long as you know who you are seeing (a real therapist with verifiable credentials), being proactive about getting the support you need can be very empowering.

If any of the reasons you haven’t reached out for support yet include things like:

*I’m too busy,*
I travel too much,
I don’t want to run into anyone in the waiting room,
I don’t have the ability to drive to an appointment,
I don’t want my _____ to know I’m seeing a therapist,
I’m home with the kids and don’t have / can’t get a babysitter,
I have a newborn at home,
I live too far away from a town with a therapist,

Then online therapy might be exactly the right fit for you!

You can expect much of the same process you would have in person – introductions, discussions about consent, risks and benefits of psychotherapy, exploration of issues and some collaborative goal setting. You’ve got to do your best to ensure you have a private space to have your session, and again, a good internet connection. Any other concerns or logistical things you notice, you should bring up to your therapist – he or she might have a solution.

All the best in your exploration of the right mental health support that fits your needs and your life.

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