



Psychotherapy in the Time of Covid-19: Learning Discussion

Karla Dolinsky, M.C. M.Sc. RCC

Saturday, 06 June, 2020

Complex Trauma Institute

Coronavirus & Covid - 19

There's very little that individuals can realistically DO in this situation.

There is also overwhelming uncertainty, great risk, and many unknowns

Clients who are already seeing us for challenging life events are now living with this collective cultural trauma and additional stressors.

So, how does that show up & how do we respond?

Some ways the 5 F's show up in the Covid-19 event:

- Engaging directly with the stressor: fear of not having 'enough' of the essentials resulting in hoarding; raising money for NHS workers (fight)
- 'Stress' cleaning, gardening, exercising, cooking and other behaviours that are not directly related to the situation but that dissipate energy and distract (flight)
- Overwhelm; distancing self from the regulations, possibly 'denying' that there is a serious issue (a version of 'freeze'): caught in looping thinking and inaction
- People connecting in an almost manic way, seeking comfort and alliance in new groups, rituals of solidarity and seeking strength in numbers (friend)

The Current Overarching Stressors

Fear of the Unknown

Some unknowns include: health risk, life plans, physical distance, financial, professional, future timelines.

If the body and mind are overwhelmed, it is possible that our defenses tune out our ability to register our perceptions and we actually cannot see what distresses us.

Isolation

We are hardwired for socialisation and physical connection. We are currently living in an unnatural state.

Attachment wounds activated.

Biologically, the new reflexive choice is to distance from others rather than connect as we walk among others.

Individual Responses to the Pandemic

Positive

- Social anxiety quieted
- FOMO quieted
- Practice ability to say 'no'
- Opportunity for self-exploration
- Safety: on own
- Time for yoga, meditation without guilt

Detrimental

- Altered freedom & safety can stir paranoid thoughts
- Suicidal tendencies
- Routine, discipline, coping mechanisms disrupted
- Safety: with others
- Addictive behaviours may surface as access to coping options are reduced

Client concerns specific to the Pandemic

- Vulnerable populations
- Working from home
- Caregivers – no respite
- Students
- Small businesses
- Suicides
- Commemorations
- Addictions – AA meetings
- Family Violence
- Existing Mental Health conditions
- Elective surgeries; ongoing treatments (dialysis); dentist
- Vacation time
- Children – unnatural state
- Touchstones and Coping
- Front Line Worker Family
- New businesses
- Faith Gatherings
- Careers; mortgages; retirement
- Being alone and isolation

What have You noticed about how your clients are showing up or presenting differently in their sessions?

Now that it's apparent that this situation is long-term, have you experienced new presentations?