

Setting up for a remote session from Wendy Gruneberg, Kamloops YMCA/YWCA

Through all these Covid – 19 changes and stresses, and agency pressures to perform and new ways of working with unfamiliar technology, be true to yourself. You are strongest when authentically yourself.

“Trying to be someone you are not is futile and will only create huge amounts of inner conflict and chaos over time, so have the courage to walk your own path, find your own voice, create your own rhythm, do life your way.” Lisa Dion.

Starting out

1. Call caregiver and discuss what technology options they and the children have access to:
 - a) Phone – Chats, Secure Video Call, Call, Web Meeting
 - b) Tablet – Chats, Secure Video Call, Web Meeting
 - c) Computer screen – Online Chats, Secure Video Call, Web Meeting

What is available is what will determine the media you will be using. Please refer to Rhiannon’s [tech safety webinar](#) as all platforms have their vulnerabilities and safety considerations.

1. Get informed consent to provide series digitally
2. Discuss safety as a priority, before beginning service
3. Book an appointment with the caregiver using this technology. This gives the caregiver the chance to feel what the experience will be like for the child and helps them gain confidence in using this technology. During this meeting I discuss the following safety considerations and set clear parameters: -
 - a) What art materials are available for drawing (*paper no wider than the child’s shoulders, especially when painting*), painting, crafting, taping, gluing in the home; What types of play dough, plasticine or slime is available; what toys e.g. Lego, stuffies, dolls, puppets, cars, fort building materials e.g. kitchen/dining chairs and sheets/blankets; what games are available e.g. tic tac toe, battleships and what books do they have..... *As the counselor I will only match what the child has and never exceed what they have. This helps support the connection between us. I may bring a storybook into session to support something Mum has revealed that the child is battling with.*
 - b) Then discuss privacy if you are going to be working with just the child. *I do not ask searching questions in these sessions as I trust that the child will censor to maintain their safety.* I arrange for the parent to be nearby and if the child needs support I text the parent to come in and join us. *I also explain to the parent I will want them to*

join us for the last few minutes of the session so I can hand the child back to the parent.

- c) I do a quick coaching on regulation with the parents to help them stay in their body and to support the child as I am only able to offer short periods of mirroring during a session once a week but Mum is with the child all day every day. *This is where I am focusing attention right now, it increases safety, is not a privacy issue and supports the child's central nervous system. I also focus on strengthening connection between Mum and child and not as much attention on the sharing of stories or the educational pieces on the cycle of violence. If the child wants to bring something up they will do so through their play and I will address the felt experience in terms of body sensations and felt emotions.*

- d) Ask Mum if child is very active, or laid back, able to concentrate or not, current interests and using this info work out if a short session is best, or active play or if something more sedentary would be suitable. *All our work is in relationship so a successful 4 minutes of connection is more valuable than a tedious strained 30 min.*

- e) If starting with a new client have Mum join the session/s until the child is very relaxed and comfortable with you and fully able to work alone with you. *Please note it is contradictory to all online safety to have a strange adult meeting with a child online. Allow time for Mum and child to get to know you and trust you. Gradually Mum can step away for lengthening periods during session. This is a wonderful opportunity to support Mum and child relationship and affirm the great work being done by Mum.*

- f) **IMPORTANT:** Self Tending, make a conscious choice to connect to your body in between each call. Walk away from your work space and tend to your body needs, breathe, stretch and take note of areas where body feels stiff or contracted. Breathe into these areas, then only move on to the next call. Sometimes take a walk down your road, go outside and breathe in the sunshine or have a cup of tea there!

- g) Prepping for a session I have a variety of bags around my chair/desk with: - Lego; boxes, tape and scissors; dough, plasticine and slime; stuffies, puppets and cars; games; art/craft materials and a selection of books.

I tend to use Secure Video Calls or messaging with 11 years and up as that is what they are most comfortable with. Phone calls and/or secure video calls with the caregiver works well. Visual platform with children 10 years and under allows for connection and engagement. I find phone calls are tough with young ones and I might just say, "hello, so great to hear your voice. Can I tell you 1 thing that went well for me this week and then will you tell me 1 thing that went well for you this week?" Next, I ask, "is there anything else you want to tell me?" If the answer is no then I check in and ask, "would you like me to call next Monday?" I simply follow the child's request. I then end the call saying, "I'm looking forward to hearing their voice again next week" or say "you can phone me any time you have big feelings getting in the way of you doing things." A short and sweet success is what I am aiming for, I do not want to inspire dread or become another chore the kiddos have to endure.

Site for teachers using visual platforms for K – 12 with some useful age appropriate adaptations. There are some documents on safety, avoiding zoom-bombing, and others too. www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/increasing-safety-in-remote-learning.pdf.

[Ed:col Planning Guide for teachers](#) This covers family considerations, planning for ages and abilities, establishing a remote learning environment, selecting and using digital tools. A lot of this information can be adapted in our work and it gives us a glimpse into what BC teachers approaches are which can help us support parents trying to teach through the barriers of their own past school experiences, poverty and limited tools, trauma and the resultant barriers that presents and juggling too many hats at once!!!!

Outline of an online session

If you have a ritual with the child that translates well to a visual platform use that or you could create connection by checking in or comparing what each of you have brought to the session. Remember to let the child show you their goodies first. This creates attunement and connection. I note the questions I have used the week before and use them each week to create rituals in the session. Lighting a candle with a parent supervising and blowing it out before you end session is an example, with one kiddo we exchange Dad jokes as we begin!!!

I always ask the child if they want me to build with them or, do they want me to watch and talk with them. I would ask this in an in-person session. If I am watching I am using observational statements, commenting on the felt sense, relational, feelings, cortex and body-based reflection pieces, so that the child knows I am there with them and in this shared experience.

With most children I let them know we have 10 more minutes and then Mom will join us. We might focus on what needs to be finished in that time and we start transitioning into talking about what we are going to share with Mum when she joins us. This helps to move the connection back to Mum and prepare the child for the end of the session. I adapt how much of a countdown I give to meet the specific needs of a child I am working with. This is when I would blow out a candle with the kiddo but I find often a bye see you next Tuesday is enough.... Often the kiddo is more interested in getting their parent to continue playing with them..... The perfect moment to exit.

Activities and games

- Lego/Duplo/Mega Blocks are favourites. The interlocking quality, easy to control and constructive nature offer rich opportunities. They work on a smooth table or on a carpet. The metaphor of control and construction is empowering for the child at a time when their control has shrunk right down.
- Recycled box construction is my next favourite activity with the very apt metaphor of deconstruction and reconstruction. I follow the child lead with this as they tend to work within their own level of competence. I am great at troubleshooting problems and suggest many solutions as well as co-regulating through the roadblocks. This is a powerful therapeutic moment. Electrical tape, duck tape and scotch tape are cheap at dollar stores. The boxes are free eg. toilet paper inner rolls, assorted boxes off food...
- Scribble tag is a wonderful activity where you have Mum and child together. On a large piece of paper, the participants each draw their den/safe place. The rule is no one can enter your den except you. With a different coloured crayon or oil pastel one person is it and chases the other whilst keeping their crayon on the paper the whole time. When you touch the other persons crayon, they become it and now chase you. Much hilarity

ensues. It helps to tape the paper to the table or floor. Old calendars are big enough and endure a lot of scribbles. I also use construction and roofing paper but newspaper or any pre-used paper can be repurposed for this. A flattened cereal box is excellent too.

- Mum reading to you and kiddo is valuable as is you reading to Mum and kiddo whilst they are snuggling together.
- All crafting can be done over a visual platform. Co- drawing or painting works well. Stick to drawing with children who are highly activated as flooding can occur more easily with paint. Consider only matching the child's ability or having them be the expert, it allows them to coach you or encourage you and experience the joy of sharing kindness or empathy.
- If your client has a battleships game they work really well as you would only see the one side anyway. Any game with this principle like mastermind also would work if you both have sets.
- Stuffedies talking and visiting over the screen work well.
- Painting a stone, you each found on a walk is fun, especially if you can paint it with Mums old nail polish or even newer ones. I use dots for this and a little goes a long way.
- If Mum is a regular at Dollar stores the suggesting painting a wooden birdhouse or plant pot (it can even be previously used – just washed and dried) Again, nail polish is great for painting plastic surfaces whilst watercolour or acrylics work well on wood.
- Decorating sticks with paint, or yarn, scraps of fabric, old buttons sequins, bottle tops, wire, beads, shells. Driftwood is lovely to work with.
- Drawing with black, silver or gold markers on found feathers (or coloured Dollar store ones) create marvellous results.
- I like to trace round leaves with Mums and kiddos and colour them in with paint or crayons. With children 7+ years you could them create patterns in the shapes.
- Making prayer flags or blessing flags from an old cut up shirt/clothing is fun. Decorate with whatever the family has to hand. You can also make feather flags by cutting out feather shapes. What fun for parent and child to go outside to hang a string of them after your session?
- Lean into activities that require scavenging in nature as this is helpful to your clients recovering central nervous system. We grow the greatest number of neurons when outside and walking in nature. Just what our clients need!
- There are lots of ideas on Pinterest, Tumblr, Art therapy sites and You Tube. Keep it simple, reuse and recycle to keep costs down, make glue from flour and water and use natures bounty.

Remember have fun, make tele sessions your own and know you do know how to do this, its just a matter of getting comfortable on your platform. Sharing your nervousness with clients is an opportunity to explore your regulation with them. What richer learning can we offer?