

GETTING STARTED WITH ONLINE THERAPY

A guide to Online Therapy by Dr Xi Liu ~ Clinical Psychologist

In a therapy session, a lot of consideration goes into optimising the physical and emotional environment in order to establish trust, stability and comfort. These are major considerations for every therapist when they set up their office space. With online therapy, the responsibility for creating an optimal therapy environment is shared between the therapist and the client. Please feel free to discuss this with your therapist in order to choose the best location and create the best atmosphere for your online therapy.

Creating the Therapeutic Space

By the time clients step into the therapist's physical office, a lot has been done to provide a stable and consistent environment each time. This includes setting up a safe space in which the therapy work can be done. With online therapy, this needs to be set up in the client's home or other environment.

Try to commit to the same place each session - some clients have a preference for a specific couch or a place that they use each time.

- *Avoid speaking in the car, as this may interfere with driving;*
- *Consider what is needed to be comfortable - have tissues, glass of water or cup of tea ready*

Safety and Privacy

Therapy sessions require privacy and confidentiality. Without this, we cannot feel safe enough to look deeply.

Find a location where you can speak comfortably and freely - try to arrange a time when you are alone at home or work.

- *Do not take a therapy call in a public place;*
- *Avoid locations where someone can walk into the room*

Distractions

In every home there are a number of things that provide comfort and distraction. These might include food in the fridge, a cold beer in the summer, a cigarette, animals that bark or attract our attention (sometimes it is because they can feel our distress).

The therapy environment shouldn't be so relaxing that it alters the client's ability to stay focused on the (sometimes) difficult conversation. Try to find that balance between feeling comfortable and feeling too relaxed.



- *No eating or drinking alcohol;*
- *Try to reduce background noise and use headphones (also useful for reducing voice distortion or echo)*

checklist

- quiet and private location
- limited distractions
- use a desktop or laptop with strong Wifi connection

Mobility vs Mobiles

It is very difficult to focus on a therapy session when talking on a small mobile screen. While the mobile is the most accessible connection we have to the online world, it is also the one that is connected to every other aspect of our lives - it often alerts us to the outside world with notifications or messages. Further, when the screen is held on a lap, it moves and lurches as we move.

- *Use laptop or desktop that is set up on a stable surface;*
- *If you need to use a mobile phone, turn off notifications and place mobile on a stable surface.*