

E-THERAPY

Lecture 6

Types of E-Therapy

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Lecture Six Outline

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6.1 Introduction

In this lecture, we will explore the various types of E-Therapy; we will explore the asynchronous and synchronous counseling. We will discuss the various types of asynchronous and synchronous counseling the advantages and disadvantages.

6.2 Expected Learning Outcomes

By the end of this lecture, you should be able to:

- a) Differentiate between asynchronous and synchronous E-Therapy
- b) Discuss the most suitable types of E-Therapy.

6.3 Types of E-Therapy

For online counselling to be effective, the counsellor must meet the client where he or she is technologically. This in essence means that the online counsellor should not use an online tool that the client is not conversant with. Some of the methods that the online counsellor may choose to use while engaging with the client may be too advanced for the client, or may end up making the client uncomfortable. For example, if the counsellor engages the client using video

conferencing, it may cause discomfort to a client who prefers not to visually connect with the counsellor.

This therefore necessitates that the counsellor offers to the client a variety of options that the client can use to access counselling and at the same time let the client know what their advantages and limits are. The types explained below fall into both the synchronous and asynchronous categories.

6.4 Synchronous types of E-therapy

Synchronous type of E-Therapy is communication that occurs in real time. It is when the counsellor and the client are connected at the same time. It is similar to face to face counselling but they are communicating via an online platform, at the same time messages are read as soon as they are received and the response is made immediately. It is 'real time' but in different locations. Synchronous counselling is conducted via platforms, such as Skype, Zoom, or instant messenger

Advantages of synchronous online counselling

- It is close to face to face counselling, clients feel that they get to know their counsellor more in this medium, have a strong impression of their presence are able to for real relationship
- It allows the counsellor and client to plan their work more easily than with email exchanges
- It is real time therefore, communication can be more spontaneous, no room for editing or refining what is written or said.
- Easy to access
- Cost saving
- Simple to set up
- Fits around. No room booking.
- Can be used anywhere.

Disadvantages of synchronous online counselling

- Equipment failure. You must check your equipment. Microphone, sound and video issues are the common problems.
- Loss of internet. You need to ensure you have a good bandwidth. However, your client may not. You may be disconnected form.

- Client may not be familiar with the technology and it can cause a hindrance to the relationship.
- You cannot always pick up on body language. Distance can seem far when the client is distraught or anxious.
- You can be disturbed. You need to ensure you are in a quiet place and that you cannot be disturbed with other people trying to initiate a call or come into your room.

Chat; chat forums commonly known as chat rooms are set up in such a way that two or more users may communicate together in real time. This type of communication can be used in group counselling, couples counselling and also in individual online counselling for those individuals who enjoy receiving a quick response from the counsellor. The same confidentiality issues discussed under email counselling are also found in chat rooms.

Advantages

Rapid response

Conversation can be viewed at a later date

Disadvantages

Not completely secure.

Messages can be copied or forwarded.

No nonverbal cues.

Skype is the most common platform to use for Synchronous counselling. However, due to Skype not being HIPPA reliant, different platforms, such as Zoom and Visee are being offered. They are all free platforms which are easy to install and use. Most laptops and desktops come with microphones and webcams and are sufficient for online counselling. However, some people choose to buy these additionally.

Advantages

No time spent on travel

Flexibility in terms of time

Able to choose a counsellor based on what the client wants

Disadvantages

Not appropriate for an emotionally distressed client.

Sometimes Skype may not work and it may need re scheduling of appointments

Instant messaging; this is widely used by young people. Instant messaging is basically the equivalent of a chat room. Yahoo, Gmail and MSN have free software that will allow the counsellor and the client to chat online.

Advantages

Immediate response

Conversation can be reviewed later.

Disadvantages

Not completely secure

Requires an email account, internet access and computer

Video conferencing; video conferencing is a most suitable type for online counselling as most of the benefits of face to face counselling are available with this mode. Use of Video allows the counsellor and the client to see and to listen to one another in real time just like in a normal face to face conversation. Use of this mode of communication requires a good connection to the internet in terms of speed and reliability. The computer must be installed with a camera and the software required communicating effectively with clients.

Advantages

Immediate feedback.

Can use nonverbal cues to support intervention

Disadvantage

Costly, requires knowledge of equipment

Usually requires some travel

6.4 Asynchronous types of E-therapy

Asynchronous communication allows for correspondence without simultaneous connection and does not allow for immediate feedback or constant flow of conversation as a result, the level of support offered via asynchronous communication is believed to be lower in comparison to synchronous forms of communication.

It is defined as a delayed therapeutic communication between a licensed mental healthcare professional and their client as a primary or supplemental approach to therapy (Yaphe & Speyer, 2011). Asynchronous counseling is characterized by four elements, including variations in communication purpose, medium, type, and degree of engagement.

The purpose of communication; this is the foundation for therapy. It provides clear expectations for the goal of the communication and guides when communication will occur and how communication will take place, while also providing boundaries for topics of discussion. For example, if client symptom relief is expected to occur as a product of a guided writing assignment, communication from the clinician may involve explaining the writing prompt and responding to the writing assignment once the client has submitted it; communication may also be limited to topics that pertain to the writing assignment.

Medium used to communicate with clients; therapists may employ a variety of mediums to communicate with their clients during the session. Most common forms of communication for asynchronous counseling include text, email, or message systems embedded in web-based platforms (Barak et al., 2009; Yaphe & Speyer, 2011).

Type of communication; asynchronous counselling typically uses two types of communication; automated and individually tailored (Barak et al., 2009). Automated responses are typically used in self-guided online modules that require clients to login to a platform (e.g., website or mobile phone application) and may serve several purposes. For instance, a client may receive an automated response as a reminder to complete a module, or, alternatively, clients may complete a set of standardized assessments and receive generic automated feedback regarding their scores. Individually tailored responses from therapist can be used with both self-guided modules and chat-based clinical exchanges. For chat-based counseling, clinicians rely on email or text message exchanges to deliver treatment.

Degree of communication; degree of communication reflects both the number of exchanges between the clinician and client and the amount of text embedded in the messages. The degree of communication between the clinician and client can range from minimal to extensive interaction (Barak et al., 2009). An example of minimal engagement is clients completing self-guided asynchronous counseling modules, where there is little or no personalized, direct interaction between the clinician and client. This form of interaction may reflect clinician-created treatment

that allows clients to access therapeutic modules online or through a mobile phone application. The client may receive automated feedback acknowledging the completion of the module or rating performance on assignments. Moderate levels of engagement tend to be more personalized and thorough, as clinicians may provide clients with feedback, reflections, and/or advice in response to self-guided modules or in the context of chat-based clinical exchanges. Further, clinicians may answer some general questions that are asked by clients (e.g., clarifying a particular task). The highest degree of engagement between the clinician and client is typically found in chat-based clinical exchanges in which treatment topics are constructed by both the clinician and client, rather than being based on standardized modules. Together, these four elements of communication largely determine the activities and scope of asynchronous counseling.

6.4 Understanding asynchronous counselling

Severity of symptoms; asynchronous counseling may not be well suited for clients with serious mental health disorders or clients who are experiencing elevated symptoms. For instance, clients who reported elevated (i.e., severe) anxiety symptoms at baseline did not effectively respond to internet-delivered cognitive behavioral therapy (Rozental et al., 2019).

Education level/literacy skills; given that asynchronous counseling heavily relies on text-based communication, clients with lower levels of education may not receive the maximum benefits of asynchronous counseling due to literacy issues (Rozental et al., 2017).

Technological literacy; asynchronous counseling may pose accessibility challenges for those who do not have access to, or have limited experience with, technology. Research has shown that a client's level of comfort with technology and, specifically, the internet may play a role in whether their experience with asynchronous counseling is negative or positive (Haberstroh et al., 2007).

Social stigma; the reliance on technology for asynchronous counseling can enhance clients' sense of privacy, which may mitigate potential social stigma surrounding counseling. Enhanced privacy may also reduce clients' inhibition, which may contribute to more openness to discussing sensitive topics and, consequently, increased counseling efficacy (Mallen et al., 2005)

Flow of communication; the delayed response time in asynchronous counselling may present some difficulties that are not present in synchronous counselling. The lag time in communications between the clinician and client produces some degree of uncertainty as to when a response will be received.

Communication concerns; asynchronous counseling cannot capture the tone of a therapist's or client's voice nor their non-verbal responses, which may contribute to miscommunication. To help manage these concerns, clinicians have suggested explicitly writing in the text changes in verbal tone or specific non-verbal behaviors to enhance understanding of text exchanges.

Technology problems; although technology makes asynchronous counseling more feasible, technology can also act as a barrier to services. Challenges such as internet connection issues or computer problems are inevitable, and, consequently, clinicians must be prepared to utilize alternative modes of service delivery when there are technological difficulties (Haberstroh et al., 2007).

Client Privacy Asynchronous counseling can increase client privacy, but several precautions are necessary to ensure client confidentiality.

6.4 Types of Asynchronous counselling

Email (Electronic Mail); the use of email is so common today. Most of us can hardly imagine what life would be without the use of email. Email as a mode of communication is very effective and efficient and at the same time most available to any client who may seek online counselling.

Nevertheless, counsellors and clients alike need to be aware of the risks involved with this type of correspondence in as far as confidentiality is concerned. There is often the possibility of the emails being viewed in cyberspace by hackers. To avoid this, both the counsellor and the client should register and use email that is specially encrypted. Clients should also be informed of the time within which the counsellor responds to the emails.

Advantages of email online counselling.

Conversation can be reviewed at a later day

Allows for more thoughtful communication

Flexible physical requirement

Flexible, client driven appointment times and frequency

Flexible, client driven costs

Client privacy

Disadvantages of email counselling.

Does not allow for immediate response

Not completely secure. (e.g., messages can be forwarded, copied, etc.)

No nonverbal and verbal cues

Requires an email account, internet access, and computer

Lack of physical presence

6.5 Summary

In this lecture we have focused on the types of E-Therapy, we have identified the advantages and disadvantages of the various types of E-Therapy. We have differentiated between synchronous and asynchronous counselling. We have discussed the concept of asynchronous communication in the context of E-Therapy.

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