

Behind the Screen: *Adapting to New Somatic Challenges in Digital Therapy*

An online workshop over 2 evenings with
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Zoom Webinar
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Location: Online streaming only
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We've all been taught to recognise transference and countertransference as key dynamics in the therapeutic relationship. **But what happens when the usual signals—like posture, energy, and spatial presence—are reduced or distorted through a screen?** In online therapy, where clients might feel simultaneously exposed yet hidden, these dynamics take on new shapes. As therapists, we are often left wondering:

How do I stay connected and attuned when I can't rely on my usual instincts?

In today's world, where therapy increasingly takes place online, there's a new layer of complexity emerging in the therapeutic relationship—one that might already be playing out in your sessions. The screen creates both a distance and an intensity that changes the way you and your client connect, often without you realizing it until after the fact. Does your client seem less engaged, or suddenly more vulnerable in ways that feel different from in-person sessions? **Do you feel inexplicably drained or detached after teletherapy, even with clients you've seen for years?**

These subtle, often unconscious shifts in transference and countertransference are real, and they matter. But how do you manage them when the familiar non-verbal cues are harder to catch in the digital space? This training delves into how these dynamics are transforming and how you can adapt—using somatic awareness and other actionable strategies—to stay grounded, responsive, and present in this new era of virtual therapy.



Why This Training?

In this training, we take a practical approach to these challenges. **You'll learn how to use your body as a tuning fork to detect the subtle shifts in your own somatic responses** that are often the first clue that transference or countertransference is unfolding. But that's not all—you'll also explore other techniques, such as real-time relational mindfulness and boundary-setting strategies, to help you stay grounded and responsive in this altered relational space.

Case Example

Consider Sarah (not her real name), a client who thrived in therapy for over a year before the pandemic, when sessions shifted to video. Initially, she seemed to adjust well to the new format. But over time, the therapist noticed a change—Sarah began arriving late, often looking distracted and avoiding eye contact, her responses becoming more brief and mechanical. The therapist noticed a shift in dynamics she could feel but couldn't quite put a finger on although there was no such feedback from Sarah. Weeks later, Sarah confessed that she felt increasingly distanced in their sessions, and at one point, even wondered whether the therapist had grown indifferent to her struggles. She revealed that the sterile digital environment made her feel exposed yet invisible—unable to fully connect or feel seen, leading her to withdraw.

This case highlights the crucial question: What did the therapist miss? Could the growing sense of disconnection have been detected earlier if the therapist had tuned into her own somatic response? Through this training, we'll examine how subtle bodily cues can provide the first insight into what's unfolding beneath the surface of teletherapy dynamics.

Key Differences in the Digital Landscape

- **Delayed or Missing Physical Cues:** In teletherapy, therapists can no longer rely on the full range of sensory data such as posture, breathing rhythms, or spatial proximity. This can make it harder to detect shifts in transference and countertransference, placing more emphasis on the therapist's internal, somatic awareness.
- **Altered Visual and Auditory Inputs:** **Subtle expressions of emotion may be missed or distorted by video lag or low-quality audio, affecting how therapists read and respond to client projections in real time.** The digital setting may amplify certain aspects of transference, such as idealization, through the very medium of the screen.
- **Increased Emotional Intensity:** Without physical presence, clients' projections may intensify. **The digital barrier may foster disinhibition or heighten emotional responses, with clients feeling less 'seen' or more distanced,** which alters the traditional transference-countertransference dynamic.
- **Therapist's Own Image on Screen:** Teletherapy introduces a new layer of countertransference, as therapists are frequently confronted with their own visual representation during the session. This added self-awareness can affect how therapists engage with clients, influencing the relational dynamic.

So how do we work with this? How can we adapt our skills to ensure we're picking up on these new, often hidden dynamics? The answer lies not just in somatic awareness, but in a blend of techniques designed to address these new challenges head-on.

Key Topics Covered

- **Somatic Countertransference in Teletherapy:** Learn to notice and respond to the subtle somatic cues that signal shifts in transference and countertransference dynamics, especially when traditional



physical cues are absent. In the digital space, these embodied signals become critical tools for grounding yourself and maintaining the therapeutic connection.

- **Navigating Digital Boundaries:** Teletherapy requires new ways of managing the therapeutic relationship. **This section explores how digital platforms shape the transference and countertransference dynamic and introduces strategies for maintaining presence and ethical boundaries, even when the usual physical signals are absent.**
- **Real-Time Attunement:** Discover practical techniques for staying present and attuned to transference-countertransference dynamics as they unfold, despite the unique challenges posed by digital therapy. This includes using your body as an anchor to maintain empathy and connection throughout the session.

Let's look at the practical techniques you'll be able to apply in your practice.

Learning Objectives:

- **Somatic Awareness Techniques:** You will learn specific body scanning exercises to cultivate somatic awareness in real-time. These will help you detect the earliest signs of countertransference and client projection, even when physical cues are limited. We'll focus on using techniques like breathwork and grounding to stay anchored.
- **Real-Time Relational Mindfulness:** You'll **practice techniques for relational mindfulness, helping you stay attuned to the moment-to-moment shifts in the therapeutic dynamic.** This will include intentional pausing during sessions and reflecting aloud on observed shifts to ensure clarity between therapist and client.
- **Boundary-Setting for Teletherapy:** You'll develop clear strategies to maintain boundaries in the digital space. From managing screen fatigue to addressing heightened emotional intensity, you will learn how to balance professional detachment with empathic connection.
- **Real-Time Interventions:** We'll introduce verbal interventions and somatic grounding techniques that allow you to course-correct as transference-countertransference dynamics arise. You'll learn how to mirror back feelings, offer moment-to-moment reflections, and use body-based techniques to prevent ruptures.

This training doesn't just offer insights—it gives you practical, actionable techniques you can implement immediately. Take control of your therapeutic space in a digital age and make the invisible visible.

About the speaker

Christiane Sanderson BSc, MSc. is an Honorary Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Roehampton, of London with 35 years of experience working with survivors of childhood sexual abuse and sexual violence. She has delivered consultancy, continuous professional development and professional training for parents, teachers, social workers, nurses, therapists, counsellors, solicitors, the NSPCC, the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Committee, the Methodist Church, the Metropolitan Police Service, SOLACE, the Refugee Council, Birmingham City Council Youth Offending Team, and HMP Bronzefield.

She is the author of *Counselling Skills for Working with Shame*, *Counselling Skills for Working with Trauma: Healing from Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Violence and Domestic Abuse*, *Counselling Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, 3rd edition, *Counselling Survivors of Domestic Abuse*, *The Seduction of Children: Empowering Parents and Teachers to Protect Children from Child Sexual Abuse*, and *Introduction to Counselling Survivors of*



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Interpersonal Trauma, all published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers. She has also written *The Warrior Within: A One in Four Handbook to Aid Recovery from Sexual Violence*; *The Spirit Within: A One in Four Handbook to Aid Recovery from Religious Sexual Abuse Across All Faiths* and *Responding to Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse: A pocket guide for professionals, partners, families and friends* for the charity *One in Four* for whom she is a trustee.

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