

Clinical Psychologist perspectives

– a working day in the spotlight

Working as a Clinical Psychologist in private practice with children, teens and families is rewarding and challenging in equal measure, particularly during a global pandemic. Dr Helen Care provides a fascinating insight into her 'typical' working day, and some of the approaches being utilised in her practice.



Dr Helen Care

Dealing with the effects of lockdown

My first session was with a girl in Year 8 who has been struggling with anxiety, low mood and self-harming. We have been focusing on managing her mood and developing strategies to manage the feelings that led to her harming behaviour. We used Narrative Therapy to push back at her social anxiety. We identified a teacher she trusted to help us gradually build her confidence back. We've identified some behavioural strategies to show her that she can cope and speak in class.

My next session involved supporting a 7-year-old who found school closures incredibly hard: he's struggling with school work and his behaviour at home is difficult. We focused on some general strategies today for understanding and managing behaviour at home, and adjusting to life now that he is back at school.

So much of my work with younger children happens through parents and carers. Often at this age the most reassuring thing is to be able to identify when behaviour is 'normal' and thinking through age-appropriate strategies. It helps to find a family's own strengths and work with those.

Just before lunch I caught up with an ex-colleague on Zoom. One of the downsides of working in private practice is missing regular contact with colleagues, especially those from other professional disciplines, but my online coffee breaks mean I can still pick the brains of my peers for ideas or resources!

Using remote therapeutic approaches

My afternoon began with more sessions, beginning with a young man who has had a difficult year with depression. This was followed by a young person who needed support dealing with a trauma. I used the therapeutic approach, Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprogramming (EMDR) to provide techniques that helped them make sense of what has happened. It's a very tiring approach for all concerned and I carried it out remotely.

Technology isn't as much of a barrier for EMDR as I first thought it might be. In fact, for almost all of my clients, remote therapy and [telepractice](#) has worked well, and for a few, it has worked better than face-to-face. Technology was already moving on but there is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the agenda further and faster.

Before I finished for the day I completed a recording of a visualisation exercise for the young girl who was struggling with confidence — this will help her to hold on to, remember, and use, a feeling of confidence. It will strengthen a memory of a time when she did feel confident, and empower her to use it to create a feeling of strength that she can call up whenever she needs a boost.

In the evening it was time for some paperwork, never something I enjoy, though it is always helpful to update other professionals, summarising what I have done and what the child or young person has achieved, or is working towards. This is all part of the process for meaningful change.



Dr Helen Care is a Clinical Psychologist who works with children, teens and families.

Together with her team at A Confident Start, she creates guides and resources to support her clients. Helen has also worked with Pearson, providing advice for anxious and worried children and teenagers as part of Pearson's [Wellbeing Zone](#).

Further information is available at www.aconfidentstart.com



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