

Embracing the Sociocultural Evolution of Technology in the Playroom

By: Rachel Altvater, MS, MA, LCPC, RPT

Change is frightening. Why interrupt something that is comfortable, predictable, reliable, and effective? When a disturbance occurs with the status quo, people often feel a host of complex reactions. Feelings may include anger, confusion, fear, wonderment, excitement, and/or indifference. There is not a correct or expected way to experience change. As mental health professionals, we know this concept all too well. We continuously encourage expression and reflection of all thoughts, feelings, and experiences that accompany change for our clients. We often facilitate therapeutic environments that encourage and embrace all stages of growth and change within our clients' lives. So, how come it is so hard for us to digest our own personal and professional transformation?

Technology is an ever-evolving field. It has grown tremendously over the past few decades. Individuals who grew up in this technological age likely have more awareness and comfort with many forms of technology. But, what about the seasoned individuals who did not grow up with technology and who are further removed? It is a multifaceted phenomenon and can bring about a lot of uncertainty and anxiety. Technology can also be quite dangerous and unpredictable at times. So, what is the point in learning about technology for treatment? If we are comfortable with what has worked for so many years, why should we deviate from that method? Many child clients are immersed in technology every single day at home and school. It is important for us to understand more about what they engage with outside sessions, so we can connect with our clients and understand more about their world inside sessions. Change is not always about altering our methods; sometimes change is as simple as modifying our perspective.

Mental health professionals should only incorporate tools in sessions that they are comfortable using. If a client can sense discomfort or apprehension, it could be detrimental to the therapeutic relationship or process. See below for tips on how to embrace change and develop comfort with technology in the playroom:

1. Explore technology on your own.

Before adapting technological interventions in the playroom, it is important to develop a sense of comfort with manipulating technology. Take the time to explore technology. Investigate tablet and smart phone applications, the Internet (you can type "list of popular websites" into a search engine to discover which sites are most active), video and computer games, popular music, and any area of technology that sparks curiosity. Become familiar with what technology is available to and commonly used among your clients.

2. Research the use of technology in therapy.

Search for recent research about the use of technology in both general psychotherapy and play therapy. Information regarding ethical practices, technological interventions, and efficacy of these interventions within therapy are essential for establishing a sound theoretical basis for your work. It is our responsibility to provide clinically competent

and ethically sound treatment. [The Association for Play Therapy Best Practices](#) has information outlining ethics surrounding technology in play therapy.

3. Establish ground rules, limits, and boundaries regarding technology in sessions.

It is essential to set clear boundaries regarding technology in therapy sessions. Will you allow your clients to bring in their own technology, or will you solely provide the technology? Will you deliver the particular technological interventions, or will you encourage your clients to bring in their own intervention ideas? What technology is acceptable and unacceptable to use in your sessions? How long will you spend on technological interventions? How will you monitor the safety of technology use within the session? How will you deliver these rules, limits, and boundaries to your clients? Consider all of your options.

4. Gradually expose yourself and your clients to technology.

Steadily introduce technology in your sessions. It is suggested to start with a simple technological intervention. Only incorporate what you are familiar and comfortable with using in session. For example, instead of playing a tangible, traditional board game, play a virtual version of the board game on a tablet. Or, prepare a therapeutic YouTube video for the session, then discuss the video with your client. The more comfortable you become with technology in session, the more you might be willing to make available for your clients.

5. Continue to self reflect on your feelings surrounding technology in general and in treatment.

Just because you feel open to, exhilarated about, or uncertain about using technology in sessions for a period of time does not mean that you will always experience these thoughts and feelings. After gradually incorporating technological interventions into sessions, continue to reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Additionally, notice benefits and detriments to incorporating these interventions in your sessions. Make note of all these insights and adjust your technological interventions accordingly.

Bio:

Rachel Altvater is a doctoral candidate at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology – DC Campus who is working on her Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) degree in Clinical Psychology. She is presently completing her internship at The Children’s Assessment Center in Houston, Texas. Mrs. Altvater currently provides treatment and assessment for child survivors of sexual abuse and for their siblings and non-offending caregivers. Mrs. Altvater is licensed in Maryland as a clinical professional counselor, nationally registered as a play therapist through the Association for Play Therapy, and nationally certified as a clinical trauma professional through the International Association of Trauma Professionals. Mrs. Altvater occasionally incorporates technological interventions in treatment, primarily with adolescent clients. She is open to and

comfortable with utilizing more technological interventions with children as there are developments in training and research in this area. For further questions, Mrs. Altvater can be reached at raw4919@ego.thechicagoschool.edu.