

Technically Avoiding the Situation



by Christine
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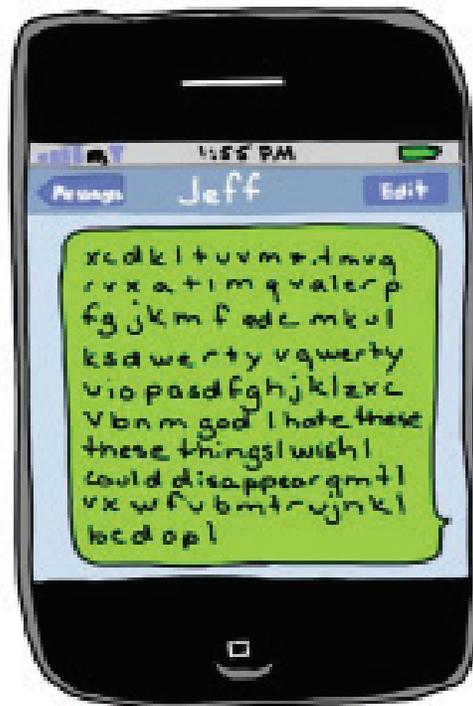
Who doesn't love tech? It keeps us connected, helps us find information on the spot, lets us pay bills at 3am and impulsively buy eBooks (I have about 30 books on my Kindle that I have yet to start reading). The great thing about being a tech savvy therapist is that you can anticipate some unintended uses of technology by your clients struggling with anxiety and avoidance.

Obviously, Google searches and checking email repeatedly can become a problem for clients with health anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder and most therapists remember to ask their clients about their behaviour online.

Fewer therapists are aware of how technology can be used as a form of avoidance that keep clients stuck even though they are going through the motions of facing their fears.

In order to overcome most types of anxiety, the rule is approach - don't avoid. If you stay in the anxiety provoking situation long enough while nothing bad is happening to you, your body cannot stay afraid and you will lose your fear of previously dreaded situations and triggers.

However, for exposure therapy to work, it's not enough for your body to be present while your mind is elsewhere. Facing your fears



Pretexting | pree-tekst-zing | verb

The act of pretending to type a text message, usually in an attempt to avoid an awkward social situation.

is an experiential process where you stay close to the thing that you dread with both your mind and your body. For example, if you go to a networking meeting, but hide in the corner looking busy while you madly type on your phone, you are not going to make any progress with your social anxiety. The smartphone can become a crutch or a safety behavior that interferes with this process. This can frustrate

many clients who feel like they are actively doing their exposure exercises while making no progress.

When helping clients face their fears, it is always a good idea to tell them to put their smartphones and tablets away so that they can be completely present and engaged. Angry Birds, the reassuring call to a partner, kitten videos and online shoe shopping (maybe that

last one is just me) can wait for another day or perhaps be a little reward for a job well done!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR:

Christine Korol, Ph.D. is a cartoonist, psychologist in private practice in Calgary, Canada and the host/producer of a podcast on WiredToWorry.com that provides free online anxiety and stress reduction education videos.