

Getting Creative in Online Therapy

A Three-Stage Framework

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Why integrate creativity in online therapy?

Standard video calls default to an intense "talking head" format that can lead to over-intellectualisation, screen-fatigue and disconnection from the body. Introducing creative tools shifts online sessions from separation to co-creation, reclaiming the sensory, liminal, holistic space that supports deep therapeutic work.

Creativity in online sessions acts as a powerful therapeutic tool by:

- accessing non-verbal experiences, somatic feedback and embodied regulation
- creating enough distance needed to explore complex topics safely (even playfully!)
- finding new perspectives and rehearsing new ways of being

Sounds good right! But how?

This **three-stage framework** provides an accessible, clinically grounded roadmap to guide clients out of their heads and into embodied, symbolic exploration.

The three-stage creative framework

Stage 1: Embodiment

Clinical focus: grounding the nervous system, accessing somatic feedback beneath cognitive loops, and shifting awareness back into the physical body through interoception.

Application: shift focus away from the screen and into physical awareness through...

- *movement & gesture:* ask the client to express an emotion/thought through a physical shape or movement
- *somatic inquiry:* prompt the client to notice breath, muscle tension, or internal sensations beneath their words, or feed back your own somatic responses
- *embodied regulation:* use physical surroundings (touching a textured object nearby, stretching, changing gaze) to ground the client in moments of overwhelm

Stage 2: Projection

Clinical focus: externalising complex internal experiences into concrete, creative containers to create *aesthetic distance*, making them safer to observe and providing new perspectives.

Application: transform the screen into a collaborative, interactive canvas (using a platform like Canva or other digital creative tools) allowing...

- *visual containment:* using a images, digital objects or art-making to represent internal states, prompt playfulness, and create safe distance
- *holistic expression:* utilising interactive web tools to prompt creative thinking and expression (like [random image generators](#), [perspective prompts](#) or [cultural soundscapes](#))

Stage 3: Role

Clinical focus: inviting the client to "step in" to a character, feeling, or part of themselves to offer an embodied rehearsal space, experimenting with new ways of being and relating.

Application: guide the client from 3rd-person observation into 1st-person exploration through...

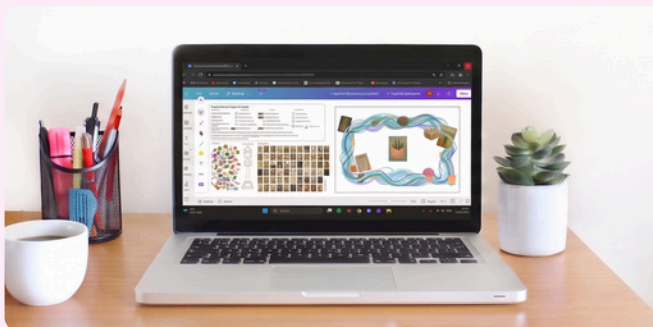
- *personification as a bridge*: transitioning from projective objects to role exploration ("If that shield could speak, what would it say?")
- *stepping into character*: inviting the client to embody a projected object or inner part through a physical statue, movement, or using 'hot seating', to notice what emerges
- *essential de-roling*: always marking the transition back to the full self (e.g. shaking off the character's posture or stating "I am [Name]") and reflecting on new insights from groundedness and the present moment.

Where does this framework come from?

This three-stage progression is from Dr. Sue Jennings' Embodiment-Projection-Role (EPR) developmental paradigm, a foundational model in dramatherapy. While rooted in play and dramatherapy, its principles offer a structured roadmap for practitioners of any modality seeking to bring non-verbal depth and holistic self-expression to their therapeutic work. By observing which of these stages feels most accessible (or most restricted) for your client in each moment, you can offer a targeted creative intervention to suit their fluctuating needs.

Ready to build your own creative toolkit for online therapy?

Whether you already work creatively but don't know how to translate your practice into the online space, or you're just starting to explore how creativity could allow you to work more holistically with your clients, I've got just the training for you!



Getting Creative in Online Therapy

A self-paced training programme by
Abigail Nelson, Dramatherapist

In this experiential, self-paced programme you'll explore...

- Dr. Sue Jennings' EPR paradigm as a framework for therapeutic creativity
- how to build your own digital projective playspace on Canva, incorporating digital objects, virtual cards and exercise templates
- what therapeutic creativity looks like in practice (*with over 20 examples*)
- experiencing creative therapeutic practice for yourself (*with 8 guided exercises*)
- and lots of other creative tools (both digital and physical) to add to your toolkit!

Click here to learn more and join the programme!