

Telehealth Strategies for Small Children (or older clients with special needs)

I'm finding my Telehealth sessions to be quite challenging with little kids, and less verbal older clients. However the following strategies have been helpful:

- Sentence completion games such as Bright Spots Thoughts and Feelings Game
- I'll ask the child to interview some of their stuffed animals or dolls while I pretend to be the studio audience
- Drawing, playdough and other sensory experiences can be opportunities to discuss feelings and thoughts in an organic way
- Have the child choose one of his or her favorite books. Then have Mom or Dad read it and discuss aspects of the story that are meaningful to the child
- I'll ask the child to choose 3-5 things from their room and describe what they mean to the child (or older client)
- Practicing relaxation techniques:
 - Belly breathing
 - Progressive relaxation (with child focused scripts)
 - Self hugs, hand massages, squeeze and release
 - Yoga positions
- Puppets! I'll ask the child to choose stuffed animals or puppets and put on a show. The Worry Woo Monsters by Andi Green have been helpful props (there is a series of books on feelings along with stuffed animals to go along with the book.) The animals make the story more compelling.

For children who are dealing with grief or stress the following suggestions may be helpful to parents:

- Make a social story for the child (or with the child). PowerPoint is a good tool for this. Shoot for no longer than 5-6 pages for young children. Briefly describe the situation with family photos or pictures from the web. This book will be a means of discussing the situation with the child. Children may want to have it read to them over and over.
- Have parents make a "cozy Corner" or place the child can go to feel safe and settled. When their temper or other emotions start to escalate they can be encouraged to go there. This is different from Time Out; it is a proactive strategy. I encourage parents to include lots of settling objects in the cozy corner.
- Books about feelings can help children develop their emotional vocabulary. This is a good time for these books to make their way into the book rotation.
- Encourage parents to set aside 15-30 minutes of focused play with each child and follow the child's lead in play.
- Maintain limits and routines. Increase family together time (like meals or games)