

NYAPT Newsletter

**SUMMER 2020
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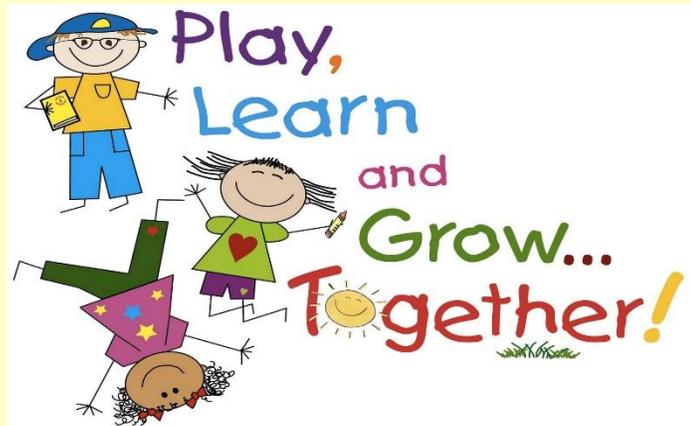
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Letter from the President



BY GABRIEL I.LOMAS, PH.D, RPT-S

During the waning days of summer, my family takes a beach vacation each year. Together with extended family, it has become a tradition to rent a home along the Jersey shore for a week. Before we all return to school and work, my children have fun swimming, playing games on the boardwalk, and making memories with family. As I write this, I am sitting on the sand and engaging in a very different type of vacation, an attempt to relax during a pandemic. While the numbers are smaller, there are still crowds of people soaking in the sun, eating, shopping, and playing at local establishments. The sense of normalcy is offset with fear and anxiety. When entering stores and restaurants, masks must be donned as suspicious eyes circle the stores looking for anyone who may have forgotten to raise their protective equipment. While there was concern that vacation would be more stressful than staying home, I admit that most of it has been joyful. Bike rides on the boardwalk, yards from the ocean have been nothing short of amazing. I have seen many smiles on the faces of my two children and I am glad I came.

While those in clinical practice have been working all summer, we all prepare for the return of children to school. It seems everyone is craving the sense of comfort we get from back-to-school shopping, first day of school photos, and the change of season. Children in schools need our support, both in and outside of school. While excitement peaks for most children on the first day of school, it can turn quickly to anxiety as challenges present themselves. The academic and social challenges in schools are important milestones for students to manage. Yet even the strongest students cannot do it alone. They need the guidance of caregivers and other trusting adults to help them navigate their journeys. Play therapists have a history of being there for children. Regardless of theoretical orientation, we all have our unique way of supporting children when they need it. We are all challenged by these circumstances as connecting with kids may prove to be a risk. While some of us are back in the office, many of us continue to see children and parents using teletherapy. By now, you are likely able to manage your client flow well. Perhaps some of us are even thriving during these trying times. Yet, it seems clear to me that our resiliency is being tested and the end of this test is not yet in sight.

As you continue your great work, I encourage you to stay positive and refill the emotional cups of children as you have before. Remember, the pandemic is not permanent and the challenges are manageable. As we engage in this upcoming school year we should remember that physical safety must be foremost for you and your clients. Maslow's Hierarchy reminds us that we cannot advance to higher order thinking without feeling physically safe in our environment. Next, we must work to create a safe emotional space for children to express themselves. While we are making concerted efforts for safety, their teachers and other providers are likely just trying to manage their curriculum in our new normal. It may not occur to teachers that emotional safety is critical for learning whether it occurs on campus or online. There are many activities that can help children express how they feel in their new virtual learning environments.

In closing, I wish all of our members the best as the summer begins to transition to fall. I hope everyone is safe, healthy, and creative in your work with children.

Sincerely,

Gabe Lomas, Ph.D., RPT-S

COVID AND COUNSELING: Preventing Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

By Stephanie Lawrence, MA, LMHC, RPT

COVID-19 and COUNSELING: Preventing Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

I don't know about you, but I. AM. SO. TIRED. The struggle to sit with our clients as they journey through grief, loss, uncertainty, fear, lack of control, and the other various stressors a global pandemic leaves in its wake becomes even more challenging as we find ourselves relating all too well to their stories and identifying in real time the very same thoughts and feelings as we also struggle to balance our ever-changing personal and professional lives. We find ourselves struggling with how to balance working from home with our kids virtual schooling, how to social distance and maintain relationships, the loss of our own loved ones, financial instability, political and social unrest, weather events and find out ourselves along with everyone else holding our breath for what new challenges this year might still have in store. We are tired on a cellular level and yet the demand for mental health care seems to be ever increasing and as a result our caseloads become filled to the brim.

As we strive to provide quality care while also maintain our own well-being, we are reminded again and again the importance of self-care. While there are certainly a plethora of other wonderful resources, articles and workshops dedicated to preventing compassion fatigue and burnout, I've compiled a short list of practical tips that have been helpful to me in creating balance in this crazy world of being a play therapist during a global pandemic.

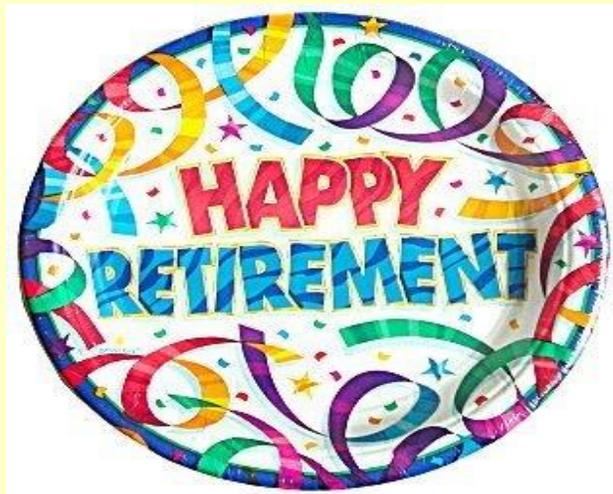
SELF-CARE TIPS AND STRATEGIES

- Take advantage of breaks between sessions to stand up, stretch, drink water, or engage in some small activity to recharge and reset.
- Spend time outside-even a five-minute walk in the sunshine can help give us a boost. I find weeding in my garden or doing some yardwork helpful, there is just something about digging in dirt that feels grounding.
- Have a pet? A small child? A spouse? Soak in the affection of those who share your space. Give the belly rub. Laugh at the knock-knock joke. Turn on the music and crazy dance. We need love and laughter to fill our emotional tanks.
- Get a plant (for black thumbs like me: try not to kill it). I highly recommend finding a hardy houseplant that does not require much tending to. My sister in law gave me a cutting of her spider plant and it has been an unexpected joy in watching it grow and having the pop of greenery in my home office.
- Lean into your community/support network. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic I believe I maybe knew 1 or 2 neighbors and would wave to the occasional dog walker on my morning jogs, but thanks to Facebook local community groups I have gotten to know those in my town much better. It has been wonderful way to feel connected and get local information and resources.
- Schedule time off. Whether is it a half day to go to the park with your kids, a weekend for hiking, or a full week's vacation, we need time to step away, log off and reconnect with ourselves, nature, faith, family and friends. I find I am more productive alternating full days of work with half days which breaks up the week, but find a schedule allowing for time off that works for you.
- Get physical. Whether it's short bursts of exercise spread throughout the day or a set formal workout routine, our bodies need to move and stretch and release the tension we tend to store in our muscles as we experience stress.
- Find ways of creating structure that feel safe and comforting. I find the most helpful structure I've added included morning routine of drinking coffee/enjoying quiet time/meditation/journaling as well as ensuring I get at least 7 hours of sleep a night.
- Own your emotions. Give yourself permission to not be okay when you need to not be okay. Take time to cry, to get angry, to do whatever you need to do to process your own thoughts and experiences. Talk to trusted friends, maintain your own therapy, and give yourself space each day to check in with yourself regarding your own emotional wellbeing.
- Listen to your body. Our bodies are designed to be in motion and they typically do not function well under chronic stress. Be sure to check in with yourself physically and address any pain, stiffness, or other health concerns you observe. Take advantage of Telehealth or depending on your local restrictions maintain regular appointments with primary care physician, dentist, psychiatrist, etc.
- Finally, remember that you are doing incredible work. You are so important, and a gift to those around you. The work is hard, but you are uniquely equipped to serve your clients, and your fellow therapists stand with you in this mission.

NYAPT past president Lois Carey recently celebrated her 93rd birthday and welcomed another great granddaughter, Lily. Happy Birthday and Congratulations Lois!



School psychologist, Brenda Damm, PsyD, RPT recently retired. She has materials and books that she hopes can continue to be used to help children- some of which are free. For more information, Brenda can be contacted at: bkd1660@outlook.com



2021 NYAPT Annual Conference (anticipated)

Please note: watch your inbox for an important member poll coming soon regarding the format of our spring conference, currently scheduled for:

April 16-17, 2021 Buffalo, NY-Lisa Dion, LPC, RPT-S:



Lisa Dion, LPC, RPT-S, is the founder and President of the Synergetic Play Therapy Institute. She is an international teacher, the creator of Synergetic Play Therapy, host of the Lessons from the Playroom podcast and webinar series and author of *Aggression in Play Therapy: A Neurobiological Approach for Integrating Intensity* (2018). She is the 2015 recipient of the Association for Play Therapy's Professional Education and Training Award of Excellence.

Conference Workshops:

April 16, 2021-*Aggression in Play Therapy*

This full-day workshop is designed to help play therapists understand aggressive play from a neuro-biological perspective.

April 17, 2021:

Playing Perfectly: A Play Therapist's Guide for Working with OCD and Perfectionism in Play Therapy

Play therapists will learn how to use themselves and the play to help these children access an understanding of the greatest perfection that exists, the child just as they are.