

Addressing Unhealthy Media Diets

Notice Changes in Clients

The never-ending stream of news, both locally and globally, pushes many people into experiencing information overload. Pay attention to see if you notice any changes in behavior with your clients, such as irregular sleep routines, racing or negative thoughts, or a dominant feeling of despair, fear or worry. And if so, use this Toolkit to offer guidance and reflection for people overwhelmed with what is going on.

Thankfully, we have a God who does not sleep (Psalm 121), who is able to bear the emotional weight that comes with all that knowledge, and who intercedes for us and what is happening in the world (Hebrews 7:25). As caregivers, we may be that constant and gentle voice that points our clients back to the God who is able to carry continual awareness of loss, pain and suffering.

The News can Create Triggers

Unlike the way we took in news in the past, it is common now for video content, audio clips, and real-time reactions to traumatic events to pop up in our feed. In addition to the news, our clients are receiving opinions, calls to action and a deluge of data, not allowing our minds and hearts to process and digest what we are seeing. The constant up-close, live feed of global suffering and the varied reactions to every event are beyond our human capacity. We were not built to be always connected to the entire world and its continual stream of loss and pain, so our bodies will react to the overload by shutting down or getting anxious.

We want clients to be aware of what is happening around them, but not in a way that causes a heightened response that leads to a paralyzed and lower functioning version of themselves – especially when they are not facing an emergency.


Rethinking Media Diets

Help your client notice the adverse response in their body, e.g., increased heart rate, thoughts that spiral, inability to sleep, hopelessness, etc. Ask questions that help them discover if these changes are coming in part from their media diet. Here are some practical tips to explore the news and boundaries with clients:

- a. Give homework outside of sessions to help them understand what information they take in daily. Instruct clients to set aside 30 minutes to evaluate their current

common social media feeds. Help them to identify the repeated messages from various sources that they are internalizing.

- b. Ask questions to help the client gain insight on what impact these images and messages have on their thinking and emotional state. For example:
 - a. *How do you determine where you get your news?*
 - b. *What information do you get from certain platforms and what do you think about how that information is presented to you?*
 - c. *How are your beliefs about the world shaped by this platform?*
 - d. *How do repeated messages from the media hinder you or cause symptoms to worsen?*
 - e. *Who might you want to pause/unfollow for a season so that you can feel more clear-headed?*
- c. Identify with your client a reasonable and specific time limit (e.g., 20 minutes) to spend in taking new information. This number will vary from individual to individual and depends on factors including the severity of their symptoms and use of coping skills. Normalize taking media breaks.
- d. Identify with your client a specific time of day when they will start and stop taking in news (unless there is a personal emergency). Just as how morning and evening rituals can protect sleep, it can be helpful to bookend your media time and have other non-negotiable media pause times. Our minds and hearts need to be guarded from continual emotional flooding so that reconnecting with others and God brings restoration and renewal.
- e. Challenge clients to actively seek out content that is about local efforts that are restoring hope, giving back to communities or the good that is happening at this current time. Often, negativity bias will make it easy to linger on the adverse events and good news will take some practice to take in and dwell on too.
- f. Assess the client's current support system and identify if there are good companions in their life this season. As a helper, make sure you're a non-anxious, non-judgmental presence, incarnating Jesus and helping them ground. When they are in distress, who do they go to and call upon? Who are unhelpful companions for processing information? Have them consider people who make them more angry, fearful or anxious when processing the news or media.
- g. Help clients actively reconnect back with God. You might be the main person in your client's life that can grieve the news with them and gently point their hurting



heart toward Jesus for comfort. Be bold in making space in session for them to release the tension and grieve the information along with you. Explore what helps to center and ground your client in the knowledge of God as the ultimate source of hope. Do visualizations help them re-experience God? Deep breathing exercises embedded with Scripture? Invitations to silence and solitude? Intercessory prayer time?

Compassion for Yourself as a Caregiver

Lastly, we also need to take care of ourselves! Prayerfully consider if you need to go through these steps to have a more balanced approach in your media diet. Doing the same work we are asking of our clients ahead of time may reduce the likelihood that sessions trigger our own un-processed experiences from the news. We, too, need to regularly remind our weary hearts that we are not to take on more than our share of human responsibility – we cannot do the saving. Jesus has already finished what man cannot complete (John 19:30).