

## **Personal Music and Imagery for Therapist Self-Care and Processing Countertransference**

During my time as a trainee therapist, I discovered that the work of holding space for clients was both rewarding and emotionally taxing. One of the most significant challenges I faced was managing countertransference—the strong emotional responses that arose in reaction to clients' stories, feelings, or situations, often reflecting my own history or vulnerabilities. Integrating personal music and imagery into my self-care routine became an invaluable tool for processing these responses and maintaining my emotional wellbeing.

### **Using Personal Music for Self-Reflection and Regulation**

Music had always been a meaningful part of my life, but as a trainee, I became much more intentional in harnessing its therapeutic qualities for myself. After particularly intense sessions, I often noticed residual feelings—sometimes sadness, frustration, tension, or even joy—that lingered in my body and mind. Instead of suppressing these reactions, I allowed myself to select music that resonated with my current emotional state. Sometimes, this meant re-listening to a piece of music used in a session with a client, or choosing a piece that mirrored my feelings, allowing me to fully experience and process them. Other times, I would select music that offered comfort or grounding, gently shifting my mood and helping me regain balance.

Listening to personal music in this way became a ritual of self-attunement. It provided a safe container for emotional release and reflection, and reminded me that my own feelings were valid and worthy of care. This practice also helped me recognise the difference between my emotions and those of my clients, creating a necessary boundary that supported both my wellbeing and the therapeutic relationship.

### **Imagery and Art-Making as Tools for Insight**

Alongside music, I found that engaging with imagery—reflecting upon clients' imagery, creating art, or taking time to reflect—deepened my capacity to process countertransference. After a session that stirred up strong reactions, I might spend a few minutes sketching or painting, without concern for the outcome. The act of translating feelings into colour, shape, and movement often revealed nuances that words alone could not access. For example, I would notice recurring symbols or gestures in my artwork that pointed to unresolved aspects of my own experience.

This creative expression not only helped me discharge emotional residue but also fostered self-compassion. By externalising my internal world, I gained perspective and could approach my work with renewed clarity and empathy.

### **Sustaining Resilience and Professional Growth**

Regularly using personal music and imagery as self-care made me more attuned to the subtle ways countertransference could affect my practice. It allowed me to reflect honestly: Was I feeling overwhelmed because of my client's material, or was something in my own life being activated? Through these practices, I brought greater self-awareness to supervision, discussed countertransference openly, and developed strategies to prevent burnout.

Ultimately, embracing creative self-care reinforced my resilience as I developed as a therapist. It modelled for myself the importance of attending to my own needs, and

enhanced my ability to offer an authentic, grounded presence to my clients. Personal music and imagery were not just therapeutic tools for clients—they became essential resources for me, and continue to be invaluable for all therapists to process, recharge, and grow.

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