



Where I work

Analyse me

Cluttered, cosy, calm or clinical?

What do our therapy rooms say about us and how we work?

Rachel Shattock Dawson describes her space

I'd say the scheme of my room is clinically cosy. It's plain cream and white, with touches of black, and natural wood floors and furniture. I seat clients opposite tall French windows, which look out onto a private courtyard filled with terracotta pots and plants, and a large expanse of sky above.

CHARLIE REST

Pebbles and shells

I came across the notion of a therapeutic use for pebbles in my first placement at an addiction counselling agency. I now have a tray of pebbles, shells, crystals, and various bits and bobs I've collected over the years. They are my little people - my props, which clients use to describe the people around them and the nature of their relationships. Who's got the hard, dark edge? Who chimes with a twisted shell or the smiley face? Who seems like a crystal-clear quartz?

Picasso's doodles

A picture is never just a picture in a therapy room. It's remarkable how many clients seem to use my prints of Picasso's line sketches unconsciously. I can see their eyes linger on them, and sometimes they later grab a pen to draw their own stick characters in a story they're retelling.

Cream leather chairs

I reckon that IKEA's Poäng chairs are probably the most-seen therapy chairs in the world. Mine are in cream leather, on a nearly black wood base. They don't dominate the room too much, as some more tank-like chairs or sofas do, and I like that they have generous armrests and a slight rocking action.

White orchids

There's nothing gloomier than the half-dead spider plants you typically find in NHS rooms. Healthy plants and blooming flowers make a space feel healthier too, and help to give a warm welcome. I like orchids, and I like how they work in a therapy room, as they can be delicate and intricate, or large and blowsy. I stick to white so they don't tip over the line into being a distraction.

The tissue issue

Giant boxes of so-called man-size tissues seem to cry out 'tears' as soon as clients walk in. Little tissues in bright dainty cubes catch the eye, don't last the course and send a mixed message about a need to prettify a good long sob. Finally, I've found the answer. Kleenex put their big, strong tissues in a small, low-lying box. I'm sold.



About Rachel

Now: integrative psychotherapist and counsellor, in private practice
Where: a dedicated therapy room sited next to the front door at home in Surrey
Once was: a glossy-magazine editor
First proper job: psychologist working in a 'human factors' research and consultancy group at Loughborough Uni
First-ever job: Saturday girl in a care home for the elderly

Play clay I always have a tub of colourful Play-Doh in my room. I might suggest clients use it to represent someone they're talking about, or to help describe their family or perhaps themselves as a child. Working with modelling clay has helped my clients get to places that talking alone hasn't reached.



What does your counselling room say about you and how you work? If you'd like to contribute to our new, regular back-page feature, email therapytoday@thinkpublishing.co.uk

