



Disinhibition Effect: What It Looks Like in Practice

The term 'disinhibition' refers to a lack of restraint or disregard for social conventions. If a person is disinhibited, they may act without forethought and without regard to risk.

The term *disinhibition effect* in online therapy was first coined by psychologist [John Suler](#) in his 2004 paper 'The Online Disinhibition Effect'.

In the world of online dating, disinhibition is very common. It usually manifests as oversharing, followed by intense feelings of embarrassment or regret.

Disinhibition effect also speaks to risk—those who find themselves caught up in the phenomena may say things online they would not say in a face-to-face encounter.

Nasty or bizarre social media interactions are an excellent example of the disinhibition effect in action.

In the counselling world, the disinhibition effect can present in many ways. Below are some examples.

- During the first counselling session via phone, a client tells all the intimate details of his sex life. In the subsequent session, he states he feels embarrassed around the details he shared with you.
- During a phone session, you hear wind noise and music in the background. When you enquire about this, the client states that she is in the car with her sister and they are going shopping.*

- You call your client at the appointed time. The client answers and during the interaction, she tells you she is using the toilet.*
- Pushing boundaries - A male client states that he wants the session to be for two hours, not one.

Disinhibition effect is most likely to present itself when counselling by phone, email or text. This may be due in part to these mediums not having a face-to-face element.

Reference

Counselling Tutor. 2020. *The Disinhibition Effect in Online Therapy • Counselling Tutor*. [online] Available at: <<https://counsellingtutor.com/disinhibition-effect-in-online-therapy/>> [Accessed 17 September 2020].

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