

“Being a human first means being your authentic self and bringing to your role as therapist your humour, your quirks, your snorty laugh, your silly voices — whatever makes you, you.”

BEING HUMAN FIRST

Remaining authentic and holding boundaries as a therapist on social media.

BY MARTINA NOVA, RCC



- Do you remember** learning how to sit and present as a therapist in grad school using the acronym SOLER?
- S** Sit squarely to the client, preferably at a 5 o'clock position to avoid the possibility of staring.
 - O** Maintain an open posture at all times, not crossing your arms or legs, which can appear defensive.
 - L** Lean slightly in towards the client.
 - E** Maintain eye contact with the client without staring.
 - R** Relax.

Now, how many of us actively practise this way of being? I can tell you right now that I often cross my legs in sessions, take my shoes

off, jump up and down when I'm celebrating something with my clients, and laugh alongside my clients so hard that we both end up crying. Perhaps, if we drop this facade that therapists are stoic blank slates and instead bring our own personalities into sessions, it'll allow our clients to see that we are all human beings and maybe even make therapy more approachable.

I hold the roles of therapist, wife, mother, sister, daughter, and friend. Above all else, I am a human being. This article is about how being a human first comes into my practice as a therapist and how I remain authentic and hold boundaries in my social media presence.

HOW THE HUMAN-FIRST MINDSET STARTED FOR ME

When I was at my grad school practicum site supporting children and families, I was working with a child whose parent was headed to a rehab facility. The family was looking for my help in figuring out how to tell the child that the parent was going to be away from home for six months. I spent hours putting together the perfect script on how to coach the parents to say the right thing. When I brought this to my supervisor, he told me to put the script down and just talk to him about what I was worried about and how I would approach this leading with my heart. He told me to be genuine, be in the moment, connect to the parents, and allow them to put the script together since they knew their child best. This supervisor told me to be myself in the session and to be human instead of trying to be this perfect therapist who had all the answers. This is where the human first mindset started for me.

BEING HUMAN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

I have a social media page on Instagram called @novacaretherapy. On this page, I split up the type of content I post; one third is psychoeducational materials, another third is business updates and notifications, and the last third involves careful personal disclosures of some kind. I have posted videos of myself dancing and being silly, shared precious moments from my life with my husband and son, provided psychoeducation, and showed how mental health has impacted my own life. I have created videos where I was a talking potato, marshmallow, carrot, and croissant. Once I even put my face on a pierogi covered in bacon bits and onions. I do this to destigmatize therapy

and make it more approachable. I have had many clients book with me because they said they felt comfortable connecting with a therapist who comes across as a non-threatening potato.

When it comes to boundaries and social media, there are ethical pieces to keep in mind. For example, I have a social media disclaimer in my highlights around friending, following, and interacting with clients on this platform. For confidentiality purposes, I do not interact with my clients about booking sessions through the IG messenger function and, instead, ask clients to email me for scheduling. Moreover, I do not solicit reviews from my clients, and I remove comments where clients reveal that I am their therapist.

As therapists, we are in a position of tremendous privilege, a power imbalance and assumption that we know all the answers and have our own lives together all the time. But to be human is to be messy, real, raw. When we are sitting with our clients and they are being vulnerable with us, there is no moment more precious than this connection — digging through the mud, laughing, crying, being with. Being a human first means being your authentic self and bringing to your role as therapist your humour, your quirks, your snorty laugh, your silly voices — whatever makes you, you.

Martina Nova, RCC, is a Vancouver-based trauma specialist who practises EMDR and talk therapy and is also a LENS Neurofeedback technician. She was born in Slovakia and immigrated to Canada with her family as a child. She grew up on the unceded territories of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlilwataʔ/Seilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, where she continues to work and live.