

SENSATE 2 AND ITS BENEFITS TO CLIENTS IN 1-1 THERAPY FOR CPTSD

What the clients say.....

- Surprised to find flashbacks stopped almost immediately
- This has really added value to my life, I feel ready to face the day each morning
- Helped me to switch off my constant racing thoughts and fall asleep
- More relaxed with the kids and able to take them out on a trip without panicking
- I felt strong and capable -ME!!
- Like having a head to toe blanket, actually felt warm inside and out
- The awful constant muscle tension just went
- I've finally been able to cry. It's like a block has been removed
- I've been talking to my friends more deeply, trusting them more
- I like who I really am after using this wee device, I want to experience more of this in my life!
- Found the motivation to open the windows and do the laundry
- Stomach more relaxed, able to eat without reflux and therefore plan and cook meals

What the counsellors say about their clients.....

- Now able to feel body sensations and connect to emotions
- Stopped nail-biting, first when using sensate, then in sessions, then also at home
- Better concentration, she can now focus in sessions, and enjoy reading a book while using the sensate at home
- Reduction in tranquiliser meds
- Connecting thoughts, feelings and events
- Seeing other people's perspective without losing his own priorities
- A new insight and understanding of other people's feelings and actions, sense of being part of her wee community; belonging
- Increased resilience in triggering situations and interactions
- Quicker recovery from flashbacks and nightmares
- Reduction in accidental injuries resulting from pre-occupation
- Insightful capacity for change in eating disorders and self-injury
- Recognition of habit formation in addiction, anxiety states and OCD

The quotes above are taken from the anonymous feedback of both counsellors and clients on the impact of using Sensate 2 to reduce chronic dysregulation in complex trauma therapy. The majority of pilot study reports begin with an outline of hypothesis, methods and outcome measurements. Here, the immediate and unavoidably positive results that have a profound effect on personal wellbeing, function and safety are intentionally placed in order of first importance, with the intention of demonstrating the value of our pilot in so many dimensions of people's lives.

The physiological influence of Sensate on vagus nerve function and nervous system activity is already well documented online through BioSelf Technology and independently reviewed on YouTube for its relaxing and calming effects. This report describes the beginnings, conception and continuing implementation of our study, and aims to be one step in publicising the benefits more widely to others who may benefit in a similar way.

We have also produced a series of short videos for our website, as a more immediate and accessible medium for many people.

Safe Space is a small voluntary organization which offers both individual and group therapy to people aged 12 years and upwards to support their recovery from the impact of sexual abuse in childhood. Our clients come from a range of demographics, but poverty, addictions and multi-generational deprivation are widely applicable to those whose life experience is based on restricted opportunity and expectation.

At the start of the covid-19 lockdown in 2020, we were awarded grants from both Inspiring Scotland and the Robertson Trust for the provision of electronic devices to encourage continued engagement with the many clients who had no access to the internet and mobile connectivity which is widely taken for granted. Having addressed the lack, and set up the remote services for those who were able to engage in this way, we also sought to ameliorate the intensifying symptoms of CPTSD and attendant problematic coping which were resulting from enforced isolation. Our proposal to the Board of Directors was for a pilot study on the use of Sensate 2 to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on our clients' fragile mental wellbeing. Our thanks go to Inspiring Scotland, the Robertson Trust, CMS Cameron McKenna Nabarro, and TESCO, whose financial support has been instrumental in what we believe to be an innovative project based in therapeutic technology.

The initial impetus for this pilot arose from the experience of offering Sensate as part of a private therapy practice, after researching the potential relief available to a client whose level of chronic involuntary muscle tension caused numerous severe medical problems. The client funded the purchase of the device themselves, and found an immediate and noticeable change in physical health, mental and emotional wellbeing, and improved self-esteem and relational satisfaction. Others swiftly followed in the use of the device, with a high proportion of successful outcomes.

The following summary was presented to the Board of Directors in January 2021, for their consideration as an investment in the therapeutic process for clients here:

SUMMARY FINDINGS ON CLIENTS' USE OF SENSATE DEVICE (OCT 2020 TO JAN 2021)

5 clients who have started using it, 3 of these are CSA survivors, 1 is a domestic abuse survivor, 1 who is testifying in a murder trial, and the other is a survivor of childhood neglect and abuse compounded by adult trauma in the Middle East. Ages range from 23 – 62 years old, both men and women, 1 who is housebound due to chronic fatigue syndrome, 2 who have been on Disability benefits for several years and 2 who are in full employment in positions of public responsibility.

In addition to the chronic fatigue syndrome, other physical conditions include fibromyalgia, migraine, severe kidney impairment, obesity, thyroid malfunction, type 1 diabetes and chronic heart condition.

2 clients are parents and 1 is a carer. 1 client used the device a couple of times and then decided not to continue. The others have reported the following:

- Immediate relief from tension-related pain
- Improved sleep
- Reduction in racing and obsessive thoughts
- Reduction in dread, hopelessness and merciless self-criticism
- Reduction in alexithymia, alexisomia and numbness
- Comfort and soothing
- Reduction in dissociation, flashbacks and nightmares
- Renewed sense of capacity, energy and resilience
- Improved ability to tolerate distress
- Improved connection to emotion and physical responses
- Greater capacity to distinguish between self and others' experiences
- Improved range of non-dependent relationships
- Increase in self-reflection in sessions
- Decrease in avoidance and externalization of problems during sessions

It will be apparent that all of the factors noted above, which have become noticeable in the space of only a few weeks since beginning the use of the Sensate, massively cut down the length of time spent in therapy, and the sometimes interminable anxiety-related reiterations of psychological immobility and collapse which are such a feature of CSA therapy. It seems likely that availability of this could allow clients to gain relief from both immediate and complex symptoms with far greater speed than usual, thus allowing them to live fulfilling lives and leaving space for others to receive similar help.

Following the immediate and unanimous endorsement of the directors, we put together a protocol for the use of Sensate in sessions and at home, and also a training session for counsellors to gain familiarity with the purpose, function and effect of the device, so that they could be comfortable and confident in introducing this to their clients.

Safe Space Sensate Pilot -guidance for counsellors

- Familiarise yourself with the sensation and effects of the Sensate, and how to moderate these.
- Think about the personal needs and preferences of the client (terminology, specific problems, routine, kids, self-care, hygiene worries) and how to articulate this for individuals.
- Spend time in session demonstrating with your own app so that the client can experience the sensation, music (if wanted), beneficial effects or unpleasant reaction.
- Facilitate client's description of experience and any changes in self state after using, during initial trial session and over the 3 counselling sessions during home use.
- Offer your own experiences and those of others, including cumulative and routine benefits
- Allow client to decide whether to take part in pilot at this point or not
- Give out feedback form.
- Emphasise that the timescale is for 3 weeks so that devices can be rotated
- Refer to safety work in sessions to consolidate loan period.
- Emphasise device care -no fluid or chemical cleaners as this is a delicate electronic device.
- Ask client to read and sign Sensate agreement.
- Signed agreement to be returned to the office

All our counsellors and group workers, whether trainees or qualified, are required to attend an intensive 4-day training on CPTSD resulting from childhood sexual abuse, of which one heavily emphasised aspect is the need for addressing psychological safety with every client. Although there are noticeable benefits of this in therapy sessions and in the client's life outside the counselling room, it is often a challenge to establish the habits which begin to build stability in the nervous system, and the ongoing need for this can be missed when both people are focussed on narrative communication and emotional history. The introduction of the Sensate device has helped several counsellors to encourage the discovery of functioning within the window of emotional tolerance in their clients without the sense of departing from the more traditional receptive style of relating which is a focus of their professional training. This has been instrumental in prompting them to suggest the value of grounding and safety as a pre-requisite for self-reflection, exploration and connection with greater confidence than before. For clients, there is a corresponding easing of pressure in attending solely to their own changing experience, without the sense of obligation to follow verbal instruction, or the potential for shaming self-criticism arising from difficulties encountered in the task.

Counsellors used the Sensate device for themselves, discussed their understanding of traumatic rupture and the effect on thinking, feeling and optimal activity, and began to refine their approach to introducing this with their individual clients.

Discussion included

- Whether a client might perceive the offer of the device as an attempt to 'fix' them and an unwillingness to take their troubles seriously
- Whether a client might feel bereft / abandoned at having to return the device if they had experienced relief and beneficial effects during its use
- What if they lose it or break it
- Do they have to try it in the session first, or could they take it away and try it in private

The process of exploring these and related ethical concerns allowed counsellors to examine their assumptions about personal responsibility, dynamics in the therapeutic setting, and the client's needs from trauma recovery.

There was a consensus that for clients whose home background was violent, chaotic and unpredictable, and those who had little influence over their environment, the requirement for safekeeping of an expensive and delicate device might be unrealistic, and this would be explored with them in addition to the aspects above.

AGREEMENT FOR TAKING PART IN SAFE SPACE SENSATE PILOT

I have tried the Sensate in a session with my counsellor, and I want to take part in the pilot project.

I understand that I will have the Sensate device for my personal use for up to 3 weeks, and that I will then have to return it for rotation. (If you would like to buy a sensate, we can provide details of where to purchase one. Sensates cost £300 each)

I agree to complete the anonymous feedback sheet after my 3 week loan so that my experience can be contributed to the pilot results.

I agree not to use water, chemical cleaners or disinfectant wipes on the device, as these are damaging to the electronics. I understand that Safe Space will take full responsibility for hygiene between loans, and all I need to do is to disinfect my hands before using, and keep the sensate device in its pouch while I'm using it to minimize skin contact.

I understand that I can allow other family members to use it while supervised, but that I am responsible for the safe-keeping of the Sensate while it is in my possession.

I agree that if I am unable to return it after 3 weeks (eg due to illness), that someone from Safe Space will come out to my home to pick it up.

Client ref no:

Initials:

Date Out.....Date Returned.....

Your feedback for sensate trial pilot

- Safe Space may be one of the only places offering the Sensate device to clients. We were given the go-ahead for buying the devices because of the positive effects that a small number of people have demonstrated in private therapy sessions. This means that we are doing something very new, and we would like to find out more about the benefits that trauma survivors experience when they use the sensate. Hopefully, this pilot project might lead to wider availability, both at Safe Space and even much further afield.

We would be very grateful if you would complete this questionnaire as accurately as possible.

It's completely anonymous, so that we can get as much information as possible about the personal impact that this has on people's lives.

Please would you answer as many of the following questions as possible (if they are relevant to you):

- When did you use the sensate (eg morning, afternoon, evening, night)

- How many times a day did you use it (average)

- How long did each session usually last (average)

- What was the most significant effect you noticed the first time you used it

- Did you have a daily routine or did you use it for particular situations, and if so what were the situations

- Did you use it before, during or after these situations

Please would you now tick the kinds of problems that using the sensate has helped with:

- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Muscle tension
- Migraine
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Racing thoughts
- Paranoia
- Feelings of dread or hopelessness
- Self-criticism
- Self-hatred
- Feeling abandoned and unloved
- Compulsive habits (eg eating, cleaning)
- Self-injury (eg cutting, burning, scratching, bleaching)
- Addictions
- Mood swings
- Irritable bowel / other digestive problems
- Anything else:

Please would you now tick any of the following which have improved:

- Feeling emotions (eg angry, sad, happy, hopeful)
- Tolerating other people's emotions
- Reflecting and thinking about reactions (emotions and behaviour)
- Recovering more quickly from difficult events (eg arguments, uncertainties, disappointments)
- Expressing thoughts and feelings when important
- Concentration and thinking
- Focusing on something important
- Sense of achievement in daily tasks
- Making decisions
- Self-discipline
- Relaxation
- Anything else:

Anything you want to add:

The reference to specific beneficial outcomes was a deliberate decision, in recognition of the range of severe and inter-related physiological problems which arise from chronic dysregulation (and indeed prompted the original exploration that culminated in this trial), and are often treated as discrete medical issues; equally, aspects of experience related to executive function, which people suffering from unresolved traumatic rupture perceive as facets of their core personality. Positive results from the Sensate have allowed clients to discover a different physical, emotional and cognitive self which can gradually be integrated into the fabric of their lives, and highlighted clearly to them the sheer scope of distortion visited upon the personality who is revealed as capable, motivated, sociable and orientated towards growth, which has been strikingly evident in the second phase of our pilot.

Phase 1 of our pilot was confined to the clients who attended 1-1 counselling sessions, and had shown interest in taking part after experiencing the benefits of Sensate in a session with their counsellor. 27 of these were female (4 were under 21) and 11 were male. The beneficial outcomes they described after 3 weeks were mostly related to improved sleep and mood, diminished anxiety, higher self-esteem and better relationships with partners, parents, children, friends and colleagues.

There were 13 clients (4 male and 9 female) who did not want to take part, either having no interest or finding the Sensate unpleasant to use.

Having found after 10 months that the rotation system amongst regular clients was working well and receiving positive feedback, we then extended this to clients who had attended the initial assessment appointment and were still on the waiting list. (This was made possible by 7 clients having bought their own Sensate device, opening up the potential to widen the numbers who might benefit from the stock that we had available.)

The majority of clients find a level of relief, hope and self-belief after the assessment session, however there can be several months wait before regular sessions are available, and this is a trying and testing time for many, who have already brought themselves to the point of taking the first steps towards recovery.

Of the 11 new referrals who were offered the Sensate after use in the assessment session, 3 preferred not to take part. For 1 client, the impact of this (in addition to feeling strongly supported by family and work colleagues) was such that she bought her own device and was able to attend to promoting a level of self-care which removed the need for ongoing therapy.

Our direction for the future is both to publicise our study to other agencies whose clients may benefit in similar fundamentally significant ways, and to hone the counsellors' skills in facilitating the consolidation of inner security and its ramifications in their clients' awareness. The experience of change is profound, and yet the daily discipline of working to sustain the new and meaningful self requires support, encouragement and focussed attention in order to thrive and grow.

SENSATE PILOT PROJECT

COUNSELLOR FEEDBACK

Please specify the types of problem areas, and then describe the kind of improvements you have observed (or heard them refer to) in sessions

Client's physiological conditions

Client's psychological conditions

Client's self-reflection difficulties

Client's outstanding therapeutic tasks (B_A_S_K)