

TELEHEALTH GUIDE FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

THERAPIST HANDOUT GUIDE

As you begin providing pediatric telehealth services, you may feel unsure about how to facilitate therapeutic treatments. This guide will offer tips and strategies to help prepare you for delivering telehealth services.

What is telehealth?

The American Occupational Therapy Association (2020) defines telehealth as the “application of evaluative, consultative, preventative, and therapeutic services delivered through information and communication technology” (p. 1). Telehealth connects healthcare professionals with clients, like children, to provide virtual services that can improve health.



What are the benefits of telehealth?

Telehealth offers a wide range of benefits for a child. Some examples are:

- Modify the child's environments
- Create health-promoting routines
- Remove barriers to accessing care
- Increase access to healthcare services
- Increase access to specific providers and specialists
- Reduce delays in receiving services and care
- Increase flexibility in treatment availabilities



What do I need to be concerned about with licensure and state regulations?

- You need to review and comply with federal and state laws and regulations, including licensure requirements. There may be specific requirements for occupational therapists to offer telehealth services.
- Be licensed in the same state where you provide the child's therapy services.
- Make sure the child is in the state where you are providing sessions.
- Notify your malpractice insurance carrier that you are providing telehealth services.



How do I maintain the child's privacy?

- Use a HIPAA-compliant video conferencing system that meets the HIPAA regulatory requirements to protect the confidentiality and integrity of therapy services.
 - Examples of HIPPA-compliant systems are Zoom and Theraplatform.
 - Skype and FaceTime are not suitable options.
- Install all needed updates on your computer and use an updated browser to conduct the sessions.
- Use secure servers, as public servers are not safe options.
- Use a private room on the telehealth platform.



What type of device do I need?



- Technology device
 - Ideally, use a desktop or laptop with microphone, webcam, and speakers.
 - A tablet and phone can be used, but they may be challenging for you to participate in certain therapy activities.
- External microphone
 - An external microphone is optional.
 - You may use it if your device does not have a high-quality, internally integrated microphone.
- External camera
 - An external camera is optional.
 - You may use it if your device does not have a high-quality, internally integrated webcam.
 - A separate webcam and a webcam mount may provide the ability to give the child different views of your therapy activities.
- Mouse
 - A mouse is optional.
 - It can be used to help you with demonstrations.
 - Some devices, such as laptops, has a touch pad.
- Headphones
 - Headphones are optional.
 - It may reduce background sounds and improve audio output and input.
 - You can use them if you want more privacy during your session or if your device does not have a high-quality, internally integrated speaker.



What type of internet connection do I need?

- A high-speed internet connection is ideal.
- If other people are in your setting, please ask them to refrain from or limit heavy internet use.
- Browser tabs or apps should be closed out on your device
- You can test your internet connection speed.
 - If your internet speed is below 3 Mbps, you should consider upgrading your internet connection.
- Wifi is compatible with most telehealth platforms.
 - For a more stable internet connection, use a wired Ethernet connection.

How should I set up my device and workspace for a session?

- Privacy
 - Use a private space in your setting.
- Noise level
 - Ensure that there are minimal noises that may be distracting to you or the child.
- Visual distractions
 - Your background should be simple and free of clutter to decrease visual distractions.
- Lighting
 - Maintain a consistent lighting source.
 - Make sure your face is fully lit, and you have good lighting in the room.
 - Avoid having the window behind you, as it may make it hard for the child to see you.
- Table space
 - Remove clutter and have an open space on your desk when you need to provide tabletop activities with the child.
- Room space
 - Have a small open, clutter-free space for movement activities to increase safety and decrease visual distractions.
- Therapy activities/tools
 - Your therapy tools and activities should be easily accessible before beginning your session.



How do I plan for a session?

- You may use platforms with a virtual whiteboard and offer screen sharing to interact with a child.
 - If your platform does not have a virtual whiteboard, you can use Smart Exchange or Tutorialspoint, which are free for account holders.
- Continue with the same documentation as you would when providing in-center sessions.
- Continue collecting data about the child's goals and use caregiver feedback to collect information.
- Prepare short videos and your favorite websites onto a word document or the child's assigned Smart Folder for quick access.
- If you create and post a video, make it "unlisted" or not public on YouTube to protect the child's confidentiality.
 - You can use Screen Caster or Vimeo, which are free for account holders, to create videos and share them with caregivers with an attached password that only the family can access.
- Send handouts or online links to caregivers in an email for you and caregivers to quickly access and allow for reviewing and printing out the resources.
- Do daily computer cleans to improve your device's usage and efficiency for therapy sessions.



How should I prepare for fine motor activities?

- A separate webcam can help provide the child with a better view of the fine motor activity.
 - If you don't have a separate webcam, you can use the camera on your device by pulling your screen slightly downward to show the tabletop activity.
- If doing fine motor activities, have similar items as the child so the child and caregivers can follow the activity's instructions.
 - If caregivers have limited tools for fine motor activities, discuss with them the items they have at home that can be incorporated into the session.
- If doing handwriting activity, provide caregivers with papers that will be used in the session.
 - You can place your copy of the paper into a sheet protector and use a dry-erase marker, so the paper can be used multiple times.
- If you decide to reward the child after completing these activities, allow time for the child to play with a toy or parent-approved virtual game.



How should I prepare gross motor activities?

- A wide-angle webcam is helpful for you to show the child how to complete an activity.
 - If you don't have a wide-angle webcam, you can place the device on a higher surface and use an open space where the child can see your whole body.
- Use short YouTube videos, such as stop/freeze and dances, with fun music to help the child move their bodies.
- Consider doing bodyweight exercises, animal walks, yoga, and obstacle courses with items the child has at home.
 - Ask the caregiver to ensure the space is free of clutter during gross motor activities.



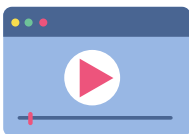
How should I prepare for self-care activities?

- A separate webcam is helpful for the child to see how you are modeling a self-care activity, like buttoning.
 - If you don't have a separate webcam, you can use the camera on your device by moving the items up close to the camera for modeling.
- Have similar items as the child so that the child and caregivers can follow the activity's instructions.
- Break down the task into simple steps with visuals or use short YouTube videos to help the child practice the skills at home.



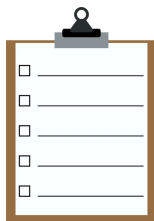
How should I prepare a session for challenging children?

- Telehealth activities can be challenging for children with decreased attention, nonverbal, limited mobility, and defiance.
- Create a behavioral intervention plan with the caregivers where you arrange the rewards for good behavior and task completion.
- Use tools or toys as motivators.
- Use first/then visuals or statements with the child.
- Use multimedia tools to engage the child in presented tasks.
- Discuss with caregivers the importance of their presence. They ensure their child's safety and assist with stopping the activity or session if necessary.



Can I complete evaluations via telehealth?

- Yes, you can.
 - Most of your evaluations may be checklists or questionnaires, such as the DAY-C and SPM, because they are easy to administer.
 - You can also provide other assessments, such as the Beery VMI, but you may need to send the test booklets to the caregivers and then have them mail them back to you.
 - These tests may not have been administered in a non-standardized manner as they were completed via telehealth.



For more information about telehealth, please refer to <https://www.aota.org/practice/practice-essentials/telehealth-resources>.

Disclaimer: The available information about telehealth OT is ever-evolving. Please verify all information before incorporating it into your interventions.

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