

Going Virtual: Tips for the Paediatric OT

The following information has been collected from paediatric OTs with experience practicing virtually. The data presented below are paraphrased and organized according to the eight steps of the Canadian Practice Process Framework (CPPF)*. These considerations are generic in nature; they may not apply to your practice setting or College Regulations. For more general OT tips, please refer to our resource titled *Going Virtual: Tips for OTs, by OTs*.

STEP 1: ENTER & INITIATE

- Consult the policies and standards of your organization and provincial regulatory bodies
- Consider developing [consent forms](#) to send to parents prior to their appointment
- **Address risks and benefits** of virtual therapy compared to in-person therapy to inform parent decision-making
- Explain the need for **increased parent engagement**
- Offer a **trial session** with parents to show them what a virtual therapy session might look like so they can make an informed decision about whether they want to pursue virtual care or wait for in-person therapy
- Consider financial, infrastructure, resource, training/comfort, and cybersecurity barriers to access and take action to minimize them



Working with Parents

Take advantage of increased parental involvement! Focus on education & knowledge transfer to best equip parents to assist their child outside of therapy sessions.



- Work in collaboration with the parents as a team
- Keep your instructions **simple and replicable** by parents
- Listen to parents, observe their interactions with the child and identify what the parent is doing really well and make sure to tell them that
- Focus on **parent coaching** by talking them through the goals, plans, and instructing them throughout your assessment/intervention
- Attend to the family dynamics and environment

STEP 2: SET THE STAGE

- You may have to build stronger **rapport with parents** to clearly explain what you want the child to do, so they are able to facilitate it
- All virtual care should be **trauma-informed**
 - Consider unintended ways you can impact someone (e.g. trigger for child who has experienced online bullying)
- Ask the child show you their favourite objects at home - this helps with rapport and may be useful to integrate into later sessions
- Get to know their home environment and home dynamics more thoroughly
- **Take your time!** Talk to the parents/child about what they want to focus on most
- Establish preferred method for reaching families to remind them of their session, and a **backup plan** should there be technological issues during the session (e.g. phone call, email)

STEP 3: ASSESS & EVALUATE

- Give prior **email instructions** on what to have ready for the assessment
- Don't hesitate to ask parents to help **position the camera** or the child at an angle where you can better evaluate the child in their environment
- When possible, and with appropriate consent, ask parents to **send a video** of their child engaging in the target activity so you can analyze prior to the appointment
- Before planning your sessions, email parents to **identify materials available** in their home that can be used for therapy

STEP 4: AGREE ON OBJECTIVES, PLAN

- Explain the details of the session to parents/child and **provide resources** they can use to help guide the session
- Be creative with the materials they have and think of alternatives that can be used
- Have **backup plans** and extra activities prepared

STEP 5: IMPLEMENT PLAN

Timing

- Consider starting with shorter sessions until everyone gets familiar and comfortable with the virtual setting
- **Shorter but more frequent** sessions may be needed to facilitate increased attention and engagement

Engaging the Child

- **Tools:** screen sharing with remote control, pictures, videos, visual schedules, drawing games, Boom learning cards, Kahoot! quizzes, Everyday Speech (social emotional learning program), show-and-tell, virtual tours, *and many more*
- By using tools readily available to the family, the activities you do will be more easily replicated for a home program, and more generalizable to their everyday life!

“
Sometimes an entire session is just going to be client/parent education or playing games with a child because that's what they need in this moment, and that's okay.”

STEP 6: MONITOR & MODIFY

- If a child is unable/unwilling to do an activity during the session, suggest the parent **record the activity** when the child engages in the activity and then show you the video
- Consider asking parents to set up two cameras during certain tasks, if that would be beneficial for your observation (i.e. log into zoom accounts on two devices)
- Sometimes children and parents may focus on showing the OT the end product of a task, so remind clients to make sure the camera is **capturing the whole process of the task**

STEP 7: EVALUATE OUTCOME

- Discuss with parents if therapy gains are being met **consistently**, even between sessions
- Discuss with parents/child whether there are **other concerns** that need to be addressed at this time and decide collaboratively if these concerns can be appropriately addressed through virtual means

STEP 8: CONCLUDE/EXIT

- Obtain parents/child **feedback** before exiting the therapeutic interaction
- Provide a clear list of **recommendations** and/or a viable home program, with useful handouts and resources

“
Be aware that parents may be under stress and sometimes just need the assurance they are doing enough for their child in this moment - focus on the here and now.”

