

# Delivering Virtual Group OT Services in the Schools

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants provide services to children in classrooms and small groups because of the benefits associated with learning in a social context. Providing virtual group occupational therapy (OT) services requires practitioners to consider how the home context may influence students' participation in such sessions. This decision guide includes considerations that occupational therapy practitioners can use to offer virtual group OT services.

## Inform Parents and Caregivers

- Follow school district or local education agency (LEA) policies and procedures for offering virtual group services.
  - Obtain written permission from caregiver, if required.
- Provide parents or caregivers with information about how virtual group services might benefit their student.
- Provide parents with school district or LEA standards and guidelines about student confidentiality when providing virtual group services.
  - Remind parents and caregivers that their student will be on camera during the virtual group session.
  - State who is allowed to observe or assist the student during the virtual group session.
  - Emphasize that virtual group sessions may not be recorded or photographed by any participants or observers.
  - Ask observers to commit to not sharing information about the session or the other students who are participating in the session with anyone.
- Encourage observers to notify their student's occupational therapy practitioner, teacher, or school administrator about any concerns that arise regarding their student's participation during virtual group sessions.
- Check in with parents, caregivers, and students to evaluate the effectiveness of virtual group OT services, and adjust service delivery method as needed.
- Create a [partnership pledge](#) to be shared with parents, caregivers, and students that includes guidelines for participating in the group and using technology.

## Plan and Prepare

- Clarify the rationale for providing group services and establish objectives for each session.
- Decide whether to offer a task-oriented group (i.e., focus on a specific skill or performance component) or a process-oriented group (i.e., focus on group interaction).
- Develop a system to track attendance and participation.
- Group students for services. Consider students' IEP goals, grade levels, interests, and familiarity with the other students.
- Communicate information about the session to students and caregivers in advance. Send reminders and/or calendar invites.
- Communicate with caregivers about their roles in supporting students during the group session.
- Provide a list of needed materials in advance.
- Check in with families or caregivers prior to the session to inquire about what supplies they have readily available. Be creative and try to use common household products and supplies that they can easily access.

- Become familiar with meeting platform controls and functions (e.g., how to mute the group, how to unmute individual students).

### Select Intervention Activities

- Select activities that appeal to the interests of the students in the group.
- Select activities that target students' IEP goals.
- Select activities that can be completed at home or in another virtual learning environment.
- Leverage technology. Consider the use of apps and other digital resources (e.g., games, books).

### Provide Support to Students

- Include a check-in activity at the beginning of the session to help students get ready for learning.
- Provide instructions or demonstrations to teach students how to perform the activity.
- Inform students of group participation expectations at the beginning of the session, and provide reminders as needed.
- Use visual supports (e.g., cue cards for turning on microphone or raising hand, examples of completed art projects).
- Provide activity choices to students.
- Provide opportunities for synchronous and asynchronous participation (e.g., videos, email, chat features).
- Provide feedback and encouragement to students during the group and on an individual basis.
- Allow time for students to practice the skills or perform the activity during the session.
- Encourage students to communicate with each other during the session.
- Wrap up the session with sharing. Encourage students to reflect on how the activity went (e.g., share challenges, show finished products, talk about how they would do things differently next time).

### Resources

- AOTA—[COVID-19 Decision Guide for School-Based Practice and Early Intervention](#)
- Arizona Occupational Therapy Association—Telehealth Resources [Telehealth Consent Form](#)
- Brady, E.. (2019). Best practices in providing group interventions to support participation. In G. F. Clark, J. E. Rioux, and B. E. Chandler (Eds.), *Best practices for occupational therapy in schools* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 349–355). AOTA Press.
- Marshall Street Initiative—[Small Group Virtual Instruction: A Quick Guide for Service Delivery](#)
- OT Tool Box—[Teletherapy Activities for Occupational Therapy](#)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education—[Joint Guidance on the Application of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\) And the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 \(HIPAA\) To Student Health Records](#)

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*It is expected that occupational therapy services are delivered in accordance with applicable state or jurisdictional and federal regulations, relevant workplace policies, and the Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics (2015).*