Delivering Virtual School-based OT Services to Young Children via Telehealth

School-based occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants provide occupational therapy services to young children in preschool and early primary grades. This Decision Guide includes information occupational therapy practitioners may consider when engaging young children during virtual service delivery.

Prepare Students for Virtual Services

☐ Use social stories to explain what will happen during virtual service delivery.
☐ Introduce visual timers, picture schedules, and calendars to explain and mark the passage of time (e.g., how many days before next OT session).
☐ Collaborate with parents and caregivers to identify a space for virtual service delivery. Consider sharing a video to show what an ideal space would look like (e.g., writing surface, space to jump).
☐ Provide parents and caregivers with a list of materials and supplies that will be needed for the session.
☐ Brainstorm back-up plans if materials or supplies are not accessible.

Establish Rapport

☐ Send pictures or videos of yourself or notes to the family that can be shared with the student.
☐ Help student make connections between physical school setting and virtual services (e.g., show picture of classroom or therapy space).
☐ Invite parents and caregivers to participate in the session.
☐ Identify the student’s interests and incorporate them into the session when possible.
☐ Encourage the student to share about themselves (e.g., favorite toy, pet) and express their feelings.
☐ Provide opportunities for the student to make choices.

Plan the Session

☐ Encourage parents and caregivers to use timers and transition objects (e.g., a specific toy or another item) to help signal that virtual services will begin.
☐ Establish a predictable routine for virtual sessions (e.g., always start and end the session with a song).
☐ Incorporate physical activity and movement breaks throughout the session.
☐ Use popular characters to help capture the student’s attention.
☐ Model the skill being taught.
☐ Use technology resources if allowable by the district or local education agency.
☐ Consider selecting a location as the theme for a session (e.g., take a virtual fieldtrip to the zoo, practice animal walks, make a lion art project).

Support the Student After the Session

☐ Encourage screen free play (e.g., games, art projects).
☐ Encourage families to continue or adopt daily routines (e.g., mealtimes, bedtime).
☐ Offer asynchronous learning opportunities (e.g., videos, activities that can be done outside of the session).
☐ Use consistent language when providing cues. Keep track of the cues provided to share with the rest of the team.

**Support the Student When it is Time to Return to the Classroom Environment**

☐ Introduce *social stories* to help explain what returning to school will be like.
☐ Encourage the use of transitional objects (i.e., those that provide comfort and a sense of security) or representational objects (i.e., those that evoke the upcoming activity, such as a lunchbox to signify eating lunch at school).
☐ Provide opportunities for students to preview the school environment and their new school schedule (e.g., virtual or in-person tours).
☐ Plan introductory meetings to share information about students with teachers and related service providers.
☐ Explain school rules and classroom expectations using social stories, videos, and other visual supports (e.g., *schedules*, calendars).
☐ Provide opportunities to meet classmates prior to returning to the school building, either virtually or while following *distancing* guidelines.

**Additional Resources**

☐ AOTA—[Back to School Resources During COVID-19](#)
☐ AOTA—[Early Intervention and Early Childhood Resources](#)
☐ AOTA—[Play Resources](#)
☐ AOTA—[State by State Chart of Telehealth Laws for Occupational Therapy](#)
☐ AOTA—[Telehealth Decision Guide](#)
☐ AOTA—[Transitions for Children and Youth: How Occupational Therapy Can Help](#)
☐ TelehealthShare—[YouTube Channel](#)

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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).*