

# **The Therapists' Guide to Implementing Telehealth in Early Intervention**

by

Christie Wroten, OTD, LOTR, owner EasySteps EHR  
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*Documentation and Billing Made EASY for Early Intervention Therapists*



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### **Services Provided via Telehealth**

1. Occupational Therapy
2. Physical Therapy
3. Developmental / Special Instruction
4. Speech Therapy
5. Foreign Language Interpreters
6. Social Workers
7. Counselors

### **Reimbursement for Teletherapy Services**

Reimbursement varies in each state. The provider is responsible to ensure telehealth services are approved by all stakeholders.

### **Technology and Equipment Required**

1. Both the service providers and clients must have a computer, tablet, or smart phone with a webcam.
2. Both the service providers and clients must have internet service with good connection, including a bandwidth with at least 1.5 Mbps (Megabits per second).
3. A headset or quality microphone for clear audio connection is recommended for the service providers.
4. Service providers with poor internet connection may need to use hotspots and boost bandwidth to ensure better connection.
5. Service providers must use a HIPAA-compliant platform for telecommunication. See Appendix for *Telehealth Videoconference Platform Options*.

### **How to Get Families Onboard**

1. Providers cannot assume clients have the necessary technology, internet service, or technical ability to participate in telecommunications for therapy. The provider must be willing to help the client access appropriate technology and provide the client with technical instructions if the client chooses to participate in teletherapy services. The provider must also be



willing to troubleshoot technical problems. Helping the client set up the video-platform is NOT a billable service.

2. Providers should provide the client with a handout detailing information about telehealth and instructions for participation.
3. Utilize a telehealth consent form. See Appendix for *Telehealth Consent Form*.

### **How to Conduct Telehealth Session**

See Appendix for *Outline of an Early Intervention Teletherapy Session* and *Early Intervention Teletherapy Session Preparation Checklist*



## Telehealth Videoconference Platform Options

There are many HIPAA-compliant options available. This is not a complete list of all platforms, but is a list of easy-to-use options with an overview of capabilities and price.

### **TheraPlatform.com**

TheraPlatform offers unlimited visits, an interactive whiteboard, resource sharing and library, session recordings, 2-way screen sharing, time tracking, and a way to observe therapists. They have appointment booking and an interactive calendar.

- 30-day free trial
- \$39/month per provider; \$29/month for each additional provider

### **Thera-link.com**

Thera-Link is very easy to set up and add patients. Once an invitation to a patient is sent, they must create an account which is an easy process. No long-term contract is required and it comes with basic scheduling. Users are able to share desktop screen, but not individual pictures or files.

- 15-day free trial
- \$45/month per provider
- \$40/month per providers for agencies with 5 or more

### **VSee.com**

VSee is easy to set up as a provider. Client setup is more difficult, but with instructions to download the app first and the steps to take, it isn't too hard. VSee allows the therapist to share files and pictures. It is easy to select from the open documents and pictures on the desktop to share. The client has the ability to scroll through the shared files at any time.

- Free account for up to 25 visits per month. The free account doesn't come with scheduling.
- \$49 - Unlimited visits with scheduling
- Expensive for groups



## Telehealth Consent Form

Telehealth is the delivery of early intervention services using distance technology, typically computers, when the therapist and client are not in the same physical location. Service providers include occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, special instructors, and other early interventionists.

### Potential Benefits:

1. Improve caregiver skills in fostering their child's development by focusing on caregiver-child interactions.
2. Reduce cancellations due to a family member's minor illness or provider minor illness.
3. Reduce cancellations due to weather.

### Potential Risks:

We want to make sure you understand that your privacy is important to us and that your information will be secure. As with any service, there may be potential risks associated with the use of Telehealth. These risks include, but may not be limited to:

1. The internet connection used may not be sufficient to allow for effective interaction.
2. The computer must be stored in a safe place to prevent damage.
3. Security protocols of the internet-based programs could fail, causing a breach of privacy of confidential medical information.

### Privacy and Security Efforts

Electronically transmitted information may include:

- Child and/or family progress reports, assessments, or other intervention-related documents
- Audio or video files from recorded sessions, including audio clips.

Security procedures will be followed to protect the confidentiality of patient/client information and to safeguard information against intentional and unintentional corruption. Only encrypted software programs will be used to conduct the sessions.



**By signing this form, I understand and agree with the following:**

1. The laws that protect the privacy and confidentiality of health and early intervention information also apply to tele-intervention. Information obtained during Telehealth that identifies me or my child will not be given to anyone outside of this study without my consent except for the purposes of treatment, payment, and healthcare operations.
2. As with any internet-based communication, I understand that there is a slight risk of security breach. However, I believe that the potential benefits of Telehealth outweigh this risk.
3. I understand that individuals other than my provider may also be present and have access to my information during the Telehealth session. This is so they can operate or repair the video or audio equipment used. These persons will adhere to privacy policies.
4. I have the right to withhold or withdraw my consent to the use of Telehealth at any time. Withdrawing my consent will not affect any future services. It will not impact early intervention benefits to which my child and I are entitled.
5. I may expect the anticipated benefits from the use of Telehealth, but I understand that no results can be guaranteed.
6. I have read and understand the information provided above regarding Telehealth, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

**I hereby consent to the use of Telehealth for early intervention services.**

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent/Caregiver: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Outline of an Early Intervention Teletherapy Session

### Prior to Session

1. Schedule the teletherapy session. Consider scheduling the session during the time of the desired routine (i.e. mealtime routine for feeding activities).
2. Send the caregiver a short “lesson plan” and list of items/toys required for the session activities so the caregiver can be prepared.
3. Prepare your materials and resources (i.e. handouts, videos) prior to the session.
4. If this is your first teletherapy session with the client, conduct a test session to work out any technical issues with the caregiver.

### Beginning of Session

1. Greet the caregiver/client.
2. Ensure that they can see and hear your (if not, close the session and begin again).
3. Give suggestions for how the family needs to adjust their microphone and webcam.
4. Have cell phones ready for communication in case you need to talk on the phone to troubleshoot.
5. Review caregiver concerns and goals from the previous week.
6. Ask the caregiver if the child has met any new milestones/accomplishments since the last session.

### Conduct Therapy Activities

1. Demonstrate the activity and explain how it relates to the session goal and daily routine(s).
2. Coach the caregiver as they perform the therapy activity.
3. Involve other family members and siblings in the session activities if applicable.

#### Early Intervention Teletherapy Coaching Methods

##### Joint Activity Planning

During the activity, remind the caregiver how this activity/strategy helps the child reach the desired goal(s). Make sure all session activities are important to the caregiver/family and address an outcome/goal in the client’s IFSP. Get suggestions from the caregiver for future activities.



Model the Activity

Break the activity down into easy steps, demonstrate, and let the caregiver try.

Listen and Observe

As the caregiver performs the activity, observe their interaction with the child, and take notes so you can provide feedback. Assess how the child performs the activity. Listen without judgement.

Verbal Feedback and Guidance

If necessary, give the caregiver *constructive* ideas to improve, reinforce, and validate the caregiver's performance of the activity.

Problem Solving

Ask the caregiver reflective questions such as:

- “How did it feel for you to do that activity/strategy?”
- “Can you think of another time/routine that the client can perform this activity/strategy?”
- “What was most challenging about this activity?”

4. Discuss how to incorporate the therapy activity into their daily routines.
5. Review the activity and how to grade (modify) the activity if necessary.

**End of Session**

1. Summarize the session.
2. Reflect on goals, success, and opportunities.
3. Identify the strategies the caregiver used that were successful, and give suggestions.
4. Discuss the next session with the caregiver, including “homework” to be done prior to the session, the toys/items needed for the next session, and strategies for the next session.
5. Discuss how the caregiver felt about the overall session and activities.
6. Schedule the next session date and time.

**After the Session**

1. Call the caregiver if any concerns occurred during the teletherapy session (i.e. the child's behavior interfered with the activities/session, caregiver seemed distracted or did not appear to understand instructions, etc.).
2. Email the following to the caregiver immediately following the teletherapy session: a copy of the daily teletherapy session note, recommendations, handouts/materials, internet resources/videos, reminder for the next session date and time.





## Early Intervention Teletherapy Session Preparation Checklist

### Environment/Setting

- ☐ Well-lit room; light should be in front of you
- ☐ Remove distractions from background
- ☐ The room should be quiet with items such as carpet and bookshelves to absorb sound and reduce background noise
- ☐ Turn phone ringers off
- ☐ All technology is charged or plugged in

### Audio/Technical

- ☐ Use a headset/microphone
- ☐ Microphone is directly in front of you
- ☐ Webcam is in good location, allowing for direct eye contact with the caregiver
- ☐ Good internet connection
- ☐ Conduct test sessions until you have a good understanding of your videoconferencing platform

### Attire

- ☐ Professional attire of dark/solid colors

### Presentation

- ☐ Sit close to the webcam
- ☐ Make direct eye contact with the caregiver by looking into the webcam lens
- ☐ Avoid fast hand movements and other distracting movements
- ☐ Speak at a normal volume and pace

### Session Planning

- ☐ Consider the client's natural environment, daily routines, and IFSP outcomes/goals when planning and preparing session activities
- ☐ Have plenty of meaningful activities planned and outline the desired order of the session (be prepared to change the order of activities to allow for a client-directed session)
- ☐ Have all physical materials prepared and readily available
- ☐ Have all computer resources (i.e. handouts, instructions, and videos) prepared and readily available to load into the videoconference platform
- ☐ Prior to session, communicate with the caregiver all materials/items needed



## References

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