

Trouble Shooting Tele-Therapy

There are numerous barriers to the provision of tele-therapy for educational purposes. Among the most challenging issues are **Technological Problems** and the level of **Student Cooperation**.

Technological Problems

There are many technological challenges that may be a product of the platform used (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, FaceTime, Skype, etc.) and the technical skills of the users (including you, the parent, and the student). Other issues that may contribute to the challenges are the devices used (e.g., smartphone, tablet, and/or laptop/desktop computer), the operating system used (e.g., Windows 10, Apple iOS), and cell phone receptivity or internet broadband width. Variations among these variables will affect the quality of interaction through this medium.

1. Platform Issues – Various platforms have different capabilities making them either quite basic (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Skype, FaceTime, Facebook Messenger) or sophisticated (e.g., Zoom). The basic platforms are good for one-way teaching (e.g., lectures, storytelling, guided movement, counseling, or consultation). Zoom for example, is capable of more interactive back and forth instruction using videos, boom-cards, and instructional apps and games across multiple devices. These capabilities offer significant instructional advantages; however, they require more technical skills from the teacher/therapist and even the parent/child. The bottom line is that you must:
 - a. Choose the platform that is best for the purposes you have in mind.
 - b. Learn how to use the platform(s) you choose (e.g., through online training videos).
 - c. Know which web browsers and devices support your platform of choice (e.g., Zoom works best on a computer using Chrome as a web browser as opposed to phones/tablets that have reduced interactivity).
 - d. Help the parents make appropriate accommodations, downloads, etc.
 - e. Practice with colleagues/friends/family and then with parents
2. Anticipate that there will be problems based on the variation in devices, operating systems, web browsers, and the bandwidth available to each individual, and PLAN ACCORDINGLY. You will have to adjust your expectations based on the reality of the resources available in the student's home.
3. Work through all these issues with the parent **first** before trying to teach your students.
4. Adjust your plans and expectations based on the tools and skills available. Technological hiccups during instruction have the effect of degrading the quality of instruction, as well as the willingness of the learner.

Student Cooperation

Tele-therapy necessitates the development of new skill sets for both you as a teacher (as you well know) and for the students as learners. Provided your skills are at a point where you have started instructional tele-therapy, and you have taken the steps to facilitate the technology in your student's home, your first job should have included teaching the child how to be a remote learner. If not, you will have to back up (more on this in a minute). Success is also dependent on building and sustaining rapport with the parent. They are your allies in the instructional process – your eyes, ears, and hands. They will facilitate or hinder your access to the student and they are absolutely ESSENTIAL to your success.

1. If you have both good access to the child and caregiver support, but you are struggling with maintaining student engagement and/or attention, you must assess whether the problem is:
 - a. environmental (e.g., struggles with competing distractions, struggles with equipment interface), OR
 - b. behavioral (e.g., the child doesn't have the skills or motivation to attend).
2. If the problem is Environmental – based on barriers within the home environment, use the [Tip Sheet I've developed for helping the parent set up the environment for success](https://bit.ly/3btKNpc) (<https://bit.ly/3btKNpc>).
3. If the problem is Behavioral – the child is struggling with sustaining attention and/or following instructions appropriately during instruction, I highly recommend that you use the [Tip Sheet I've developed for teaching instructional control](https://bit.ly/3bzAECy) (<https://bit.ly/3bzAECy>).
4. The keys to success are mastery of the technology, having the parents as collaborative teaching partners, fostering a good learning environment, and well planned lessons that are realistic in terms of the technological limits in place, the capabilities of the child, and the demand load you place on the child.