

ONLINE THERAPY in a NOW” VIRTUAL WORLD”

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), which is the professional, scientific, and credentialing association for Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists, has recognized teletherapy as a valid means of service delivery for speech and language disorders. Additionally, there has been a body of research evidence that shows online speech/language therapy is just as effective as in-person therapy. It's important to acknowledge that the method in which therapy is delivered is really only one part of the equation - the person delivering it can be just as important, and perhaps even more so, which is why finding the right Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) that meets your specific communicative needs is crucial.

Although my practice has always provided online Aphasia and Apraxia therapy, even before the pandemic hit, I think it is clear that providing consultations and therapeutic services virtually has become the “new norm.” As we're all continuing to deal with a lot of change and adjustments, I thought it might be helpful to provide a resource that shares the positives of online therapy, as well as some potential challenges, so that your options can be fully explored and evaluated. Additionally, I provide a list of potential solutions to the challenges identified, as many of them have easy resolutions.

POSITIVES OF ONLINE THERAPY

- **SCHEDULING FLEXIBLE** appointments can be more
- **SAVE TIME** as there is **NO** need for **COMMUTE TIME**
- **CONVENIENCE** = fewer **NO SHOWS** or **CANCELLATIONS**; therapy appointments don't require scheduled transportation or depend on road conditions (i.e. snow, ice)
- **IMPROVED ACCESS TO SERVICES** – regardless of where you live
- **MORE AFFORDABLE** – Online therapists are typically able to provide lower costs
- **ACCESSIBILITY** for those with physical limitations
- **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**, allowing individual to feel more comfortable, easier access to communication partners in the home, therapist gets a better idea of living environment to incorporate into at-home tasks

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES OF ONLINE THERAPY

Click on each potential challenge to read our recommended solutions

- [Technological Glitches: audio interruptions or videos freezing or being delayed due to poor internet connection; weather conditions and power outages](#)
- [Need for tactile cues for articulatory placement not possible](#)
- [Visual attention or attention challenges](#)
- [Credibility and reputable business, and concerns regarding privacy and equipment use](#)
- [Reduced quality of visual cues and more difficult to assess body language](#)
- [In-home distractions \(i.e. dogs barking, children interrupting, etc.\)](#)
- State licensure challenges for therapist, requiring them to have a license in the state where patient resides



SOLUTIONS

Technological Glitches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I have had my patients or their loved ones call their provider and request a higher bandwidth, as they need it for therapeutic purposes, and it hasn't been an issue. We usually recommend at least 5 Mbps for upload and download speeds. How can I find out what my upload/download speeds are? Go to www.speakeasy.net and click on "Go to speed test" and it will run a test and display the upload and download speeds for your device. ● I have also found that closing other apps or programs or reducing the amount of open browsers also helps to improve connections. ● Consider purchasing a router booster for improved connectivity. ● A reset on your router or reboot on your device can also help to fix intermittent glitches.
Tactile Cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide instructions to a caregiver or helper at the remote end to assist with tactile cues if the patient is willing ● If the individual is also working with a local, in person SLP, collaborate with them and discuss suggestion for tactile cues in conjunction with therapy techniques
Credibility and Reputable Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Look at reviews of the business/professional online ● Be a good consumer and interview the business or therapist before committing – i.e. what makes you different from the other therapy centers? How do you track progress? How long have you been practicing in this specialty? ● Ask if it would be possible to speak with a current client or caregiver that has been working with them ● Do some research and request evidence of proper credentials and HIPAA compliance ● Make sure your therapist is familiar with working in telehealth. There are a lot of tricks and tips to improve the experience/experience with quick fixes for tech issues, that only come with practice in telehealth from the therapist's end.
Privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure the SLP provides you with documentation regarding the platform they use and the safety/security features it has ● You should also be required to sign some form of informed consent that provides information on what measure(s) the business has in place to ensure client privacy and confidentiality during telepractice sessions, including security of treatment rooms and remote access to electronic documentation



Visual attention or attention challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure the meeting has been maximized to full screen to eliminate any distractions from computer or device background ● Make sure your therapist is using a platform that allows for whiteboard use or annotation, allowing them to draw the patients' attention to words or stimuli by putting a box around it or underlining it ● There are often options to hide the video view of yourself, so that looking at your own image does not become a distraction during therapy sessions
Reduced quality of visual cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Different viewing settings allow you to view the therapist's video as the whole screen, letting you see a closer view of his/her visual cues (articulator placement). ● A caregiver or helper can assist in providing visual cues, if the patient feels comfortable
In-home distractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Schedule therapy sessions when distractions around the home are minimal ● In-home distractions are a part of real-life, and an opportunity to work on divided attention and focus within a therapy session during a language activity ● Reduce noise and visual distractions around the home where the session takes place

I do not really like computers and am far from being tech savvy:

A very common deterrent for participating in teletherapy is if someone feels they are not technologically savvy or haven't had much experience with computers. Participating in telepractice **DOES NOT REQUIRE** tech experience! If you are truly unfamiliar with a computer or electronic device, you don't even have to touch it once you are signed in by a caregiver or helper. And with the right setup, even those with limited computer knowledge can learn to sign themselves in by setting up an email specific for therapy invites and leaving that email logged in.

