Episode: 11
Title: Telehealth in Paediatric OT: Practical Tips and Strategies
Hosts: Mahek Bansal & Larissa Ferrari

Mahek Bansal
Hi everyone. Welcome back to another episode of the New Possibilities podcast. We are so excited to have you back with us today. Today we're going to talk about telehealth practice in OT. We're going to continue our conversation from last episode, but today more specific typically talk about some practical tips and strategies of how to prepare for your telehealth sessions, how to set them up for success, and how to build your toolkit for telehealth. So maybe we could start with Larissa sort of talking about the different ways we might use telehealth as OTs.

Larissa Ferrari
Yes, sure. I think there are three things I really consider before even prepping to my session. So for example, am I doing a one on one session? So is the clients really participating in that session with me? Or does this child for some reason need someone to facilitate or to support their participation? So if they're too young or not that engaged with technology or because of any other reasons like communication or other barriers. And then there's the parent coaching opportunity when we are guiding the parents or the main carers to put strategies into place to understand more what's happening and sharing more than their concerns with us. So depending on each situation, I think the preparation goes a little bit different. But I think overall we need to start with a few things to consider. Right? So would you like to start with that one?

Mahek Bansal
Yeah. So I guess the first thing to consider is what platform you're going to use for your telehealth session. So there are a whole tonne of platforms out there and we're going to link a resource in our show notes as well that has a bit of a comparison of all the different platforms and their features and things like that. But maybe Larissa and I can just share our experiences of the things that we find really helpful in terms of features of the platforms when we're doing telehealth. So for example, one of the features that I find really helpful is screen sharing. So if I've got a resource or an activity or something on my computer, I want to be able to share my screen and share the audio.

So if I'm doing like a video, a movement break or anything like that, I want to be able to share that with my client. And the other feature that I found really helpful is the remote control feature. So it's the feature where someone else, the client, can control your mouse pad on your screen. So that I find especially for older clients or clients who are very engaged over technology, it can be a great way to still collaborate and have that sense that you're both working on the same thing and play games and things like that. Are there any features, Larissa, that you find really helpful?

Larissa Ferrari
You've picked my two favourite ones, three actually, because I agree with the audio

one. But these features you've mentioned, they really facilitate taking turns and this is very important in our sessions. That possibility of I'll have a turn, you have a turn, we do things together. So that remote control with a share screen for me are the best features. Also the other thing I really like is when you have the whiteboard so you can draw and write things and when you have the remote control and you both can engage with that whiteboard, it's also really nice. Even though drawing with a computer can be tricky in terms of the motor coordination, it's still a good resource to use.

Mahek Bansal
Definitely. And I think the other thing to consider, something that we've had to consider in our practice is sometimes the practice management software you use can have a video conferencing feature through that. So here we use Cliniko and it has a video conferencing feature which can be really easy because it already links it to the appointment and sends the link to the parent when the appointment is set up. However, one barrier of that is that you can only have one client join the video. So for example, doing parent coaching, you just want to make sure you have a platform where if the parents, two parents are in two separate locations, both of them can join individually.

So I guess just considering your individual circumstance and checking that the platform you're using will be compatible with that and obviously as well using platforms that are secure, that meet the HIPAA standards and things like that,.

Larissa Ferrari
Like for privacy and confidentiality. Yeah, totally. And I guess the other thing is that some platforms are free but then with limited time. I think most of us know that already, but some others can offer unlimited time or longer time for you to be able to do your session within that time frame. Because sometimes, for example, some platforms will offer you 45 minutes but then if you couldn't finish your session within that time, it might not be nice just to have the screen shut down for you and your client. So this is also something to consider - like do you want to pay for signing it up or would you like to choose another platform? And are you paying for something that have all the resources that you need? So these are also things to consider when choosing a platform.

Mahek Bansal
And the only other thing I can think of is being able to record. So I think that I've found helpful. Some parents have requested it when I do parent coaching that they can record the meeting and have it to refer back to. I guess just considering if your platform has that capacity, but also where those recordings are being saved again for privacy and confidentiality.

Larissa Ferrari

Episode: 11
Title: Telehealth in Paediatric OT: Practical Tips and Strategies
Hosts: Mahek Bansal & Larissa Ferrari

Great. I guess before even choosing the platform, some things to consider is your internet connection and if you've got a plan B. So for example, Australia is a country that has a lot of wind and I feel like windy days leads to poor connection. However, I found my 3G connection or 4G connection on my phone very secure and much more stable. So just to have that as a backup plan, you already know how to connect on your computer if you need to do that shift like in the last minute. I feel like this is a really big thing when we're doing online sessions because if you cannot do your session because of internet connection there you go. It's lost. The time is lost. So it's always good to have a backup plan with that.

Mahek Bansal
Yes. And I think linking in with using the platforms, whatever platform you choose, just spend some time becoming really familiar with it. Not only will you have to navigate some issues that might rise on your end, you might actually have to instruct the other person on how to mitigate issues happening to them. So I guess you just need to be really familiar with how to connect your speakers, the right microphone, mute, unmute, video, things like that, just so that you feel confident using that platform.

Larissa Ferrari
Yeah, we had an example here, were using one platform and then we switched to another one. So we end up calling each other just to give it a go and try and it's a good way to practice and be really expert in terms of the platform to support your clients. Totally agree.

Mahek Bansal
Awesome. So I guess now that you've chosen your platform and you've got a client, you're going to start doing telehealth sessions with, how do you prepare for your session Larissa?

Larissa Ferrari
So I'll just talk about the basics. Considering the three main things I've mentioned at the beginning, I guess the first thing is to think, am I going to work with that child directly? If so, what are the goals? Have we set the goals? Is the child aware of the goals? Because we'd be talking straight away with the client and just then finding the best tools to help with this goal. Is it something I have to do it through a game? Is it something I have to do through a visual schedule? Can I combine these things? So just considering the level of participation and what things I have to have in place to make sure the client can participate. Would you like to add something to this one or maybe bring a new one.

Mahek Bansal
Yeah, in terms of preparing for me, for telehealth, it's finding out what the client has available to them. And I think I sort of touched on this last episode, but very

specifically around firstly, what devices are they going to be using for the telehealth session? Where in the house are they going to be using it? Are they going to be on the couch? Are they going to be at a table? What resources do they have available, what toys, what stationery general items they have in their house, who's going to be home at that time or who's going to be around if there is an issue? Spend some time just sort of talking to the parent or the carer about what that environment looks like, what that situation looks like. So then you can use that information to have your backup plans in place to choose your activities and your resources accordingly.

Larissa Ferrari
Yeah, adding to that, this is something we can help get the parents to help us to prepare. So for example, before having the session, we can ask the parents to maybe make a video or send some photos of the rooms they have available in the house. We can ask the parents to consider where the internet connection is better in their place. For example, their bedroom may be the best place, but if connection is poor, then we have to think of another place and maybe having photos and videos really help us to picture how we can make that work, if that makes sense. And I think they really understand so when you use that one on one time you can use in its best.

Mahek Bansal
And I think then the next step is once you know, you've got a picture of the client situation and what they've got available and you know what the goals are and you've identified that and sort of really fleshed that out, then I think the next step is thinking about the goals and thinking about what activities you will be able to do on telehealth that are going to be engaging and that are going to use things that are available to the client. So I guess it's now that process of matching and using our clinical reasoning and creativity as OTs to find and think of those activities that are going to be really engaging because chances are you probably can't just replicate a lot of your clinic activities the way that they are in a telehealth session. You have to find your own activities that are going to be suitable for this.

Larissa Ferrari
I think adding to yours, it will be very hard for me to talk about preparing without giving examples. So I'll come up with a real example. For example, let's say I have a client with handwriting issues, and then I might get the parents to prepare the equipment I'm going to use or the materials I'm going to use. So when I'm preparing for the session, I'm relying on the parent to organise some things for me. But it might be that they couldn't. And I already have to have a backup plan in my mind, and that goes back to bottom up versus top down. So handwriting would better if you could practice handwriting itself. But let's say we don't have the equipment. So in the back of my mind, I do have some exercises I can do without any resource or something I can do with a screen that can support that skill required to do handwriting. And just to have both options available will prevent you from going out of ideas like, oh, my goodness, you don't have the equipment. What are we going to do? What's the next

step? You've already prepared for that. You can move on if the clients do not have what's required for that specific activity.

Mahek Bansal
100%. And I think, like we talked about in our last episode, a big benefit of telehealth is accessibility. It's trying to make our services more accessible. So we don't want to have this feeling of needing specific resources that if they're not there, it's not accessible anymore. It's onto us to make sure that we can be adaptable, we can be flexible. Thinking about sometimes in a client situation, what they have is really limited. I've worked with clients who are traveling. They're in a campervan, and they're traveling and doing therapy on the road. So then there's very limited resources. And some things to consider is maybe setting up a little therapy kit. Like if you're doing some goal that's really specific that requires specific resources or a few things that you can use and then adapt.

For example, a little fine motor kit. Pop in a few pegs, some paperclips, some pom poms, a few things that you could send to the family and you know that they've got this kit. And then you can think of different ways to use these items, adaptably, and that way you're still making therapy accessible. You're not relying on the parents who might have a limited capacity, or in their day to day life things are chaotic for them. So I guess it's thinking outside of the box a little bit on how we can keep telehealth accessible.

Larissa Ferrari
Yeah. Another thing I really like is the activity analysis we always do in our sessions, but then how we apply this for the home environment. So, for example, let's say you're working with daily living activities. You want the child to be more independent, and then the child required some visual cues or some things in the house or the parents need to guide them and then you ask the parents maybe to try something on that week and it doesn't go very well. So then why that hasn't gone very well, have that background information and then rethink how you can adapt that for the following sessions.

Maybe try to have the parent recording it because we might see the photo of the house and picture something going really well, but because of many other factors like busy routines, lack of resources or things like that, it's just not going to go as you expect. So then just to have that activity analysis and collaborative work with the parents or the main carriers just to find what is doable at that time and then we can go from there. However, I think this is not only a telehealth tip, we can use it every time.

Mahek Bansal
100% and I guess you can prepare as much as you can. But in the session, during the session, things can happen, things can go wrong or things change. So in terms

of setting your session up for success and having that confidence during your sessions, as we said, the backup plans are a really important part. I think linking into the backup plan like we would in a clinic session is understanding your client in terms of the types of regulation strategies or sensory strategies that might support the client and considering how these can be adapted for a telehealth session. So that during the session you can be responsive to how the child is presenting or to what they're showing that their nervous system is needing because it's the same. We need to promote that engagement and that regulation in order to work on goals.

Larissa Ferrari
I think the other thing in terms of the regulation that you're saying, or if the child, sometimes the screen can be really distracting and this is part of the regulation process. So another practical thing I could think of in telehealth sessions is sometimes just having a black screen so I'll turn off my camera so the client doesn't see me and then I can be placed in a place where the client can't see the screen. And this is also a way we could guide the parents to do things with a child without having the screen as a distraction. It might not be ideal because we have a limited view, but it might be a way to support that attention and regulation sometimes.

Mahek Bansal
Definitely. And just being creative again, it comes back to knowing the environment, you know, couch cushions for an obstacle course or

Larissa Ferrari
Blankets,

Mahek Bansal
Blankets or you know, even movement breaks on YouTube or meditation videos and things like that. Just have that backup of the strategies you feel like will support this child or that you want to try with this child that you can sort of pick up very quickly in a telehealth session. I think that will really support the success of the session.

Larissa Ferrari
And the last thing for me is that if by any chance the child couldn't engage with a session with me or the client, then how can I use this opportunity for a parent coaching? Then how can then I switch a direct session with a client to a parent coaching session and get the parent to understand a little bit of the clinical reason behind my activities, how the parents can carry on during different opportunities in the week or the day. And this could be very valuable in terms of resources for the parents or the main carers.

Mahek Bansal
100%. I think telehealth is an ongoing process in terms of us as clinicians, feeling confident, feeling that we've got all of our backup plans and it's a little bit of a trial

and error as well of learning and reflecting. So I think keep all these tools in your toolkit to pull out. But of course these tools can change as you build more experience and confidence with it and also as you get to know a client better over telehealth. Because whether it's a new client that you've sort of never seen in person or if you've seen in person and moving to a telehealth format, telehealth can provide its own individual challenges and opportunities. So sometimes it also just takes a little bit of experience with a specific client in relation to telehealth to get an understanding of what would work in their situation.

Larissa Ferrari
I also feel, Mahak, that us as OTs, we are so trained to do things and then when we see ourselves behind a screen with a limitation in doing with, doing together, that feels not comfortable, not natural, not OT, but I guess it's just using technology to support doing in different ways. So just to have that in the back of our minds

Mahek Bansal
And I think that you don't need to feel like you need to sit and watch as doing telehealth as therapist. You don't need to have it at the computer and just tell and instruct, you can do. Have the same toys with you or similar toys with you and do them alongside each other. Whilst there is that physical barrier and separation that feeling of doing things together still fosters that interaction, that meaningful connection. So I would 100% say that most of our telehealth sessions should still be us "doing". We might not have the physical space together, but whether the client is sort of focused on their own activity and not necessarily looking at the screen, it still fosters that connection and it's a way to show that we're in this together.

Larissa Ferrari
Yeah, I totally agree and I do see this as a big potential for the future and it's happening already now. But just to reach more people that need OT, just for us to be more flexible in the places that we work. So I can see many benefits to it and yeah, looking forward to the amazing things that's going to come up with all these technology advances.

Mahek Bansal
Yeah. I'm so excited. Well, thank you so much, everyone. I think Larissa and I have shared lots and lots of tips, but we would love to hear know yours - your own experience of using telehealth, things that worked for, you know, we can all support each other in our experiences. So please feel to connect with us. Let us know any tips and strategies you have, and otherwise, Larissa and I look forward to being with you again in our next episode. Thanks, everyone. Bye.