

Episode: 13**Title: Parent Coaching in Paediatric OT/ Benefits, Barriers, and Success Strategies****Hosts: Mahek Bansal & Larissa Ferrari****Mahek Bansal**

Hi, everyone. Welcome back to the New PossibilOTs podcast. Larissa and I are so excited to be with you again. This is the first episode that we're recording after the new year, so we're so excited to come back after a little break and be with you all again. Today we are talking about parent coaching, so we thought we share sort of what that looks like for us and how we use it in our practice, some of the reasons we use it, and things to consider, and hopefully offer some tips and strategies that you might be able to use. So, Larissa, let's just jump straight in. When do you use parent coaching?

Larissa Ferrari

So I think we've been using quite a few times in here. Apart from the parent planning, we have regular sessions with parents to support them in different ways. I guess one of the things I would consider, of course, is the most obvious one, when they can't access services nearby, so they live in a rural or remote area, and the children, for some reason can't attend the sessions online. So that's when we will use the parent coaching to support them in their child's goals. Would you like to raise another reason why we would use a parent coaching session?

Mahek Bansal

Yeah, definitely. I think for us, some goals lend themselves very much to a parent coaching model. Some goals like emotional regulation, like feeding, things like that, where they require a lot of consistency in implementation in the home environment or the natural environments for the child, where maybe we can't address it in the clinic because we don't see those behaviours or because we can address it here, but they just need that follow through at home. So that's when parent coaching can work really well, whether that's educating the parents and then also giving them resources and coaching them of how to use them at home and implement them so that we can work towards our OT goal.

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah, and adding to that, Mahek, I feel like sometimes when we start seeing children in face to face sessions, they start developing so well their skills, but then the parents start mentioning that they're doing very well in the clinic setting, but they're not as well in the home environment or at school. So that's when the parents keep asking us a lot of questions and you can realise they want more insight so they can learn themselves how to put that into practice in the home environment. And I feel like that's a good time where we want to shift that face to face session with the child to a more like a parent coaching session so we can guide the parent and try to get them to implement the strategies themselves. And sometimes that we need, as you said, some education, some insights about what's on the background of our reasoning and then guiding them with the resources and everything.

Mahek Bansal

Yeah, and I guess parent coaching can look different. Sometimes parent coaching can be regular frequent appointments, like you can have either purely parent coaching every week, every fortnight, or for a period of five to ten sessions, however, is needed, or sometimes it can just be as the need arises. So if I have clients that I see weekly in the clinic, but sometimes things come up where we need time between me and the parents to just chat through it and we'll organise a parent coaching session or we don't have an opportunity to

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speaking very in depth in the session because my focus is with the client, so then we'll organize a parent coaching session whenever is needed.

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah, and I guess the only other reason I could think of that a parent coaching might be beneficial is when, for example, the parent's more flexible than the child in terms of availability. As we spoke before, in Australia we do have waitlists for occupational therapy sessions and most of our clients are in school. So sometimes parents don't want to take them out of school to attend sessions and the parent could still benefit of learning from us and implementing their strategies at home and they can be more flexible with their working hours. So we could see the parents, guide them, maybe do some intensives with their child during the holiday, the school holidays, but just carry on with the strategies with the parents.

Mahek Bansal

And so it's a great way to keep that consistency of the service. And of course we work with for us again, the client is the child and the family. So I guess it lends a way to support not only the child but the people around them. And we only see the client once a week maybe. So it's another way to sort of have that consistency of the goals and targeting and working towards our goals. I actually read a study, an article just before this, which is quite interesting. It was a literature review done in 2015 that saw that out of all of coaching interventions used in all of OT, that the most were used with parents and caregivers of children with occupational performance issues.

So I guess it just shows that it is such a big part of our scope, especially in paediatric OT, where our client centred focus is that whole picture, that whole family. And so it has great strength in helping us to support all the people involved in a child's life.

Larissa Ferrari

That's great. And I think a lot of the literature will be positive, especially after Covid that the parent coaching has great benefits, and it's actually a great way to empower the families to carry on with the activities, because, as you said, we do work with occupational based goals, and this is a great way to make sure that the parents can carry on with the strategies in the natural environment.

Mahek Bansal

So we've talked a bit now about the benefits. I mean, being able to work around busy schedules and wait lists and having a bit more flexibility, I guess, also being able to have that consistency in different environments. There are some barriers to parent coaching, though, that we do need to consider, because that cannot stop us from doing it. But it just means that once we consider this, we can put into place good strategies to make sure that our sessions are as successful as they can be. So, Larissa, would you have any particular barriers you want to mention about parent coaching?

Larissa Ferrari

I think one of the main barriers at the moment I find with not only clients, but with my friends as well, that have children, is that we are very busy in our day to day life. And parent coaching means that the parent will have, like, homework, if that makes sense. And even

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though we can help them as much as we can, the practical part of it will be with them. So, busy schedules, busy routine, busy environment. Usually when we have a lot of emotional dysregulation around that and the parents are afraid that disrupting a routine could cause any more issues that it will be hard for them to handle. So just having that consideration of when is the best time? How to start slow. Why to start slow? When is the best time to start?

So taking that barrier and turning into something more positive for the parents to really trust the process. That would be my first barrier, but with a solution. What's your barrier?

Mahek Bansal

I want to add to that feeling busy. There's also another aspect to that for parents, which is their capacity to put these things into place where they might not be busy in terms of work or schedules, they might just emotionally, mentally, physically not be in the right place to feel on top of things, to feel empowered to be able to take on new strategies and resources and things like that. It can be really challenging being a carer of a child with additional needs. There's a lot of emotional and physical demands that come with that. So I think we need to be really understanding and empathetic. But I guess that parent coaching then might be seen as an additional demand. So it's definitely something we need to consider. Is it the right time, is it the right method and type of intervention and figure out how we can support a parent to feel like it's not just another demand on them, but it's actually there to support them.

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah. And I think adding to that, Mahek, I feel like it's very important for us to set what's the expectations because that can be also a big barrier. If the parents expect that a huge change will happen from day one, a huge positive change will happen since day one or that we're going to come up with this great strategy that will work right away. And I feel like it's always a process. So just setting up the expectation, what we're planning and why we're planning on going this way and focusing on the importance of the consistency and the routine and then just working out, like being very empathetic, but working out with their expectations and how we can set to a good level of expectation so we can keep working towards the same goal and they could maintain their motivation towards more positive outcomes.

Mahek Bansal

And I think expectation goes both ways. As a therapist you could be walking in expecting to talk about strategies for emotional regulation and trying to understand the routine and give strategies, but the parent is just expecting to expand their knowledge base, to feel supported, just have some validation so that can cause a miscommunication. So I guess expectation goes both ways and maybe we can sort of start linking into some of our tips because I think tip number one from me would be that to have some sort of conversation before your parent coaching session with the parent to understand so that you're both on the same page of what the expectations are, whether is it education about a specific topic? Is it finding particular resources and strategies, is it problem solving? What's the expectation of the session?

Is it something that only maybe needs just one session, one quick catch up? Or is there potential that it might need a follow up? I think having those things outlined clearly from the

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start, before the session can make sure you go in on the same page and so it can feel more successful.

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah. And sometimes even that can be a process because when they come to you want to check what's the purpose, understand the purpose of that parent coaching. The parents have something that they really want to work on with their family or the carers. It doesn't have to be the parent. Whoever is having that session, they want to have a solution for the issue. So when we try to understand what's the issue, we can try to work out with them is it more like an education process, resources or how can we guide that process with them?

And I guess my other strategy would be as I've mentioned before to put yourself in the parents shoes. Try to imagine yourself before turning yourself into an OT - the access of information you had before, what you knew about the resources, and then try to reason with the parent, where they are at and how they're feeling, and then how you can meet them in the same level and just come with a very positive environment to support them.

Mahek Bansal

And I think expanding on that is putting yourself in their shoes also means coming from a place of understanding. Again, curiosity, not having judgment. When if a parent is expressing difficulty with certain things, or you as a therapist, maybe you don't feel like what you're saying is being taken on, then have that level of reflection as to why parents generally just want the best for their child. But there can be a lot going on for them too. So I think understanding their situation, taking time to show that you are understanding that and you're genuinely concerned about that will come a long way in terms of even just building that trust and that rapport and making sure that those things that you're taking, the strategies that you're giving are actually being taken on.

Larissa Ferrari

And that's a good one Mahek, because if we think about the place we live in Sydney, I feel like we're pretty multicultural. Well, I was born in Brazil, so I'm living in Sydney and I see all sorts of people in the clinic. So it's pretty much a multicultural place. So considering where we live, I feel like taking into consideration their culture as well. So to be curious and ask them, apologise if you don't know about their culture, but try to understand what that mean. Where do they eat? Try to understand, for example...

Mahek Bansal

Whose involved in the family? Who lives at home? All of these things. Yeah, definitely.

Larissa Ferrari

Why is it important for them, for example, to be in the church every Sunday, things like that it might not make sense for one person, but it does make a lot of sense for another person. So then you can really understand where the parents are coming from with their needs. Guess that's a very big one for us to think.

Mahek Bansal

Yeah, definitely. So that's, I think, two tips. So let's go tip number three. As were talking

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about busy schedules, just feeling parents have a lot going on, especially they have multiple children in their family, things like that. I think one big thing is once you've understood the daily routine and what happens in the household, I guess consider when you're providing tips and strategies, if you want them to be successful, they need to be achievable and realistic in terms of the parent being able to implement them. So sometimes things that can easily be incorporated into an existing routine or is routine based can often be easier to implement for a parent rather than something they have to set aside time outside of the routine to do, and maybe things that can be done with everyone in the household so that siblings don't feel like they're being left out. So I guess by having that first step of understanding and curiosity and finding all that information will then help you to provide strategies and tips that are not only relevant, but that are easy to implement.

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah, and I would add to that, maybe sometimes if that involves some literacy from the parent to the child, or from the main character of the child, just to think of when the schedule is less busier than usual. So, for example, if mornings are more busy than the afternoon, then maybe we should start in the afternoon and then check how that's developing. So then you can implement in the morning routine that's less likely that the parent will have that extra time to prepare anything or. Yeah, it's just considering what time of the day works the best sometimes. I guess my tip number four would be to maybe empower the parent to be able to prepare resources so then you can provide the parent with the resource, but empower them to be able to prepare more so they're not always dependent on you.

So, for example, if they need to work on a visual schedule, maybe work with one of the things we've mentioned on the telehealth episode - we do a shared screen. We show them how we do one, why we do one, what type of language do we use according to the child's age. And then we just do it together. And at the end of the session, you have a great resource, but you've also empowered the parents to modify that resource if needed. I feel like having something at the end of the session, like a takeaway or a resource is great, but even better than that is trying to empower them to be able to do that themselves if needed.

Mahek Bansal

100%. I guess the taking away a resource is also good because often you talk about lots of things in an hour and you finish the hour and you go, oh my goodness, there was so much like, what happened and what do I need to do now? So sometimes it's good to have something physical or online that the parent can be directed to, to know, okay, this was the focus, this was the follow through, or whether that is just you writing notes and sending the strategies you discussed to the parent afterwards as a follow through, just, I guess for a parent it can be really overwhelming. There's lots of information and lots of things discussed. So I guess just having something to take away from it, to feel like they feel empowered and on top of things.

But I guess, as you said, when we talk about coaching, it's different to just an initial assessment. It's not just gathering information. We're trying to not only educate, but teach. This parent is the expert of their family, of their child, so we are just trying to add more resources alongside that to help them in that role. So I guess when we come in bringing resources, considering our questions, we could provide suggestions, but then offer reflective statements and questions to get the parent to start thinking and identifying their own

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strategies that might be helpful to them. Yeah, and I think that again comes back into our purpose. Why are we doing this session? All of those things.

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah, and I guess it might be obvious, Mahek, but I think we should say the obvious sometimes. All the things we use in our sessions with a child we should use with a session with a parent or a carer, which is build rapport with a parent. Make sure that the parent can trust you, that the parent feel that you can listen to their concerns. Read the body language of the parent. When you're bringing a new resource or some education around one specific topic, check if the parent feels like they're understanding or they have that clueless face that they're like, what is talking about? Just read the body language. Use your reassurance. Make sure that they feel comfortable. We're telling you like, wait, where are you going? I can't understand that it doesn't make sense. So we're making sure that they're just understanding the big picture and why that resource might work. And if it doesn't work, why there's another reason, other resources we could use.

Mahek Bansal

And I guess while you're building that relationship, it's our responsibility as a therapist to keep that line of communication open. And we might need to do it really consciously. We can't just assume that the parent is going to feel comfortable to tell us, keep checking in. Is this okay? Do you think it's realistic? Like, I want to work with you, it's just something to try. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work - we'll go back to the drawing board. I guess having all of those statements really validate and hopefully help the parents to feel confident, to share their true reflection on what you're saying just so that you can move forward. They don't feel like they're just being told what to do and they don't have a say in it. It's a two way, collaboration, problem solving type of purpose.

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah, well, I think that was all of my tips and strategies because all the other things would be very specific to the parent's needs. What do you think? Have you got anything else to think?

Mahek Bansal

I mean, I think we've sort of covered the general overview, and as you say, I guess every different child, every situation probably has its own specific strategies, but I'm really keen to hear from everyone if they've got any more strategies that they'd like to share with us and with the community, because we can all learn from each other. Just reflect. Even if parent coaching is something that we've been doing for a while or if we're new at it's always just good to sit and reflect and just have some food for thought of why we're doing things. Is there a family that we've had in mind for a while to organise a parent coaching but haven't got into it? Then this is your sign to do it. So please feel free to reach out and, yeah, share your thoughts and ideas with us.

Otherwise, Larissa and I are looking forward to speaking with you and connecting with you again on our next episode.

Bye.