Introduction to the Decision Guides for Virtual School-Based OT Service Delivery via Telehealth

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) is the national professional association established to represent the interests of occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and students. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants (i.e., occupational therapy practitioners), work in schools as related service providers and specialized instructional support personnel. OT practitioners facilitate academic and nonacademic outcomes (e.g., social skills, behavior management, recess, participation in sports, self-help skills, prevocational/vocational participation, and transportation) for children, adolescents, and young adults transitioning out of school.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, new challenges have been presented in the school setting, which include delivering school-based virtual services via telehealth. AOTA defines telehealth as the application of evaluative, consultative, preventative, and therapeutic services delivered through information and communication technology (AOTA, 2018). Throughout these decision guides, the term "virtual" is used interchangeably with telehealth and implies the use of a remote service delivery model.

Conducting virtual occupational therapy (OT) services requires practitioners to be flexible and implement services in different ways. Practitioners must consider legal and ethical factors related to service delivery. When providing virtual services, the OT practitioner must consider the aspects of the OT process affected, such as the validity of evaluations, effectiveness of interventions, and reliability of monitoring outcomes virtually. Practitioners must also facilitate new ways to collaborate with administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and caregivers regarding components of an individualized education plan (IEP), as well as consider ways to support each other, and navigate burnout.

AOTA produced Virtual School-Based OT Service Delivery via Telehealth Decision Guides to provide practical tips for practitioners to navigate these challenges when implementing the OT process. The OT process is outlined in the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process, 4th ed. (2020) and serves to guide decision making related to virtual OT services.

The occupational therapy process may be applied to persons, groups, and populations, and consists of three-parts: evaluation, intervention, and outcomes. In the schools, the process may be applied to students, schools, or school systems. Unique to the occupational therapy process is the practitioner's therapeutic use of occupation to enhance performance and achieve participation. OT practitioners must consider all three parts of the process and use an occupation and client-centered approach when identifying best practices for virtual OT service delivery for individual students or student groups.

Example: Decisions Related to Virtual OT Process—Individual Student

This example illustrates an occupational therapist's considerations when preparing to provide virtual school-based OT services for a student.

Evaluation

☐ Provide virtual consultation and screening (e.g., review academic history, choose and administer standardized screening tools)
☐ Develop an occupational profile virtually

☐ Analyze occupational performance virtually (e.g., context, performance skills and patterns, client factors)

Intervention

☐ Develop a virtual plan (e.g., create student-centered goals, select outcome measures, and adopt theoretical framework)
☐ Deliver virtual services (e.g., implement intervention)
☐ Review virtual intervention (e.g., reevaluation/response to intervention, review progress, modify plan)

Outcomes

☐ Measure outcomes (e.g., monitor progress, identify change)
☐ Consider transitions (e.g., move to a new setting or program)
☐ Discontinue services (e.g., plan for discharge or graduation)

As seen in the example above, the OT process helps practitioners identify factors to consider for virtual service delivery and ethical decision making, such as selecting valid standardized assessment tools to administer online and the need to monitor progress remotely.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants may access additional resources at aota.org.

References

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020). Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (4th ed.). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 74* (Suppl. 2), 7412410010. https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.74S2001

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