

Voices from the Field: Pam Dawson



Q1: What are some of the benefits and challenges of tele-intervention?

Tele-Intervention (TI), which is sometimes called a virtual home visit, can be a viable service delivery model in the field of Early Intervention, and can have measurable benefits. Tele-Intervention can increase the use of family centered practices. As early interventionists, we strengthen a families' capacity to support their child's development by increasing parent knowledge and improving parent-child interactions. Families can best learn new skills when we provide opportunities to practice them through a coaching model. When an EI provider is not physically in the home, the coaching model becomes essential and a parent becomes the primary facilitator of the child's activities. The provider, at the distant site, can offer guidance, modeling, and feedback to the parent. TI also offers the opportunity for all family members to benefit from the early intervention because sessions can be recorded and viewed at a more convenient time outside of the work day. Tele-Intervention increases access to qualified providers and reduces travel constraints. In many states, families often live in remote, rural areas that challenge our ability to provide cost effective access to qualified providers in the child's natural environment. Implementation of TI often reduces mileage travel expenses and travel time between appointments can significantly be reduced, offering the potential for early interventionists to provide services to more children in the same amount of time. Cancellations due to weather or a child's mild illness can also be reduced. Tele-Intervention increases teaming opportunities, too. It can be difficult to schedule meetings when several professionals, often from more than one agency, are involved. Joint visits are ideal but may be limited due to distance or scheduling. Professionals working with a child can join home visits via TI when scheduling is prohibitive.

There are challenges associated with Tele-Intervention or virtual home visits, and we must recognize that it isn't appropriate for every family or every provider. Some families may simply desire the support that only the physical presence of a provider can give. TI sessions can be combined with traditional home visits to meet the needs of individual children and their families. It must be kept in mind that TI is one delivery platform for providing quality, family-centered services. Both the family and the provider must feel confident with technology and have a quiet place to access high quality internet connection. Providers must have the parent coaching skills necessary to deliver intervention remotely. Obtaining reimbursement for tele-intervention services remains a challenge in some areas, however this is changing rapidly. Just as it is true in a session within the home, when you use Tele-Intervention, you need to ensure that your actions are compliant with HIPAA, FERPA, and Part C requirements.

Q2: What strategies support an effective tele-intervention session?

Here's a few tips for setting yourself up for success when you are implementing a TI session.

First, conduct a test session. A test session with the parent will allow you to establish rapport. Consider doing the test during the child's nap time to help you and the parent have a relaxed, conversational interaction. One advantage of Tele-Intervention is that the family is truly in the "driver's seat" for these sessions because the provider is not physically in the home. Some families may be less familiar, and maybe less comfortable, with this approach so it is important to take time to talk through this aspect of TI from the beginning. Providers should make sure to explain their role as a supporter and coach, and the parent's role as the child's primary "teacher." The test session is a good time for a brief overview of how future sessions will be structured. The test session also allows you to assess technology and bandwidth. Make sure you discuss the quality of the sound and the video, the importance of lighting and background noise.

Communication before a session is also important. You can communicate with the family via email, text, or phone call several days before the session. Doing so will allow you to confirm the appointment, send the lesson plan/goals for the session, identify who will be at the session, both on the provider side and the family side and discuss arranging the home environment for the session with the parent. Make sure you set up your environment prior to the session, too. Parent-coaching based early intervention sessions, whether through TI or in person, typically follow a similar format, with each session divided into three main phases.

First, reviewing the goals and activities. Second, conducting the lesson and/or activity, and third, debriefing and reflecting. When you review goals and activities it is an opportunity to check in with the parent on how things have been going since your last session. It gives the parent a chance to update you on their successes and challenges during the week, as well as any new developmental milestones or behaviors that have emerged. You can then review your mutual goals for the current session. When you conduct the lesson/activity it is critical that, as an early intervention provider, you establish engagement on the part of the parent during this phase of the TI session. This can be accomplished by a defined "hand off" of the activity to the parent after a period of modeling or demonstration of new techniques by the provider. As the parent is leading the activity, the provider can provide coaching through observing, commenting and reflecting together. The discussion should include opportunities for integration of the new strategies into the daily routines of the home.

After the planned activity, you and the parent will reflect on the session goals, successes and opportunities. Talking with the parent regarding their comfort level with the session and highlight how the parent used the targeted strategies and the child's responses. You can offer specific next steps for the family to try during the coming week. As a session draws to a close, the early interventionist and parent can jointly determine environment, activities and strategies of the next session. Make sure to discuss together the continuation of goals or the selection of new goals based upon the parents' comfort level and the present performance of the child.

Just as it's important to provide written follow-up and notes on the session to the parent following an in-home visit, it's also important to provide the same for a TI session. However, because you are not physically in the home, you will need to do that either through email or U.S. mail. After each session you can email/mail the following to the parent. A written summary of session through your session notes. Recommendation for carryover during routines based intervention in the home

for the coming week. Offer parent support or any coaching information that you, as a coach, have to give both for the previous session and also for the coming week. You can talk about any new materials that might be used during the week to carry over the skill. And you should also provide the date and time of next session.

Suggested Resources

National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management (NCHAM): <http://www.infanthearing.org/TI-Guide/>

- Setting up a Tele-Intervention Program
- Assessing the Home Capacity Checklist
- Technology and the Home Environment Checklist
- Provider Intervention Self-Evaluation Form
- Tele-Intervention Feedback Form
- Tele0Intervetnion Release Form

Center for Connected Health Policy: <http://www.cchpca.org>

- Provides state-specific information including state laws, reimbursement policies pending legislation and state report cards

Telehealth Resource Center: www.telehealthresourcecenter.org

- Includes links to two national centers and 12 regional centers