



### Autism and Teletherapy - How Teletherapy Can Support Communication Skills for students with Autism in ECE.

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Sara Smith, Lead Product Manager, E-Therapy M.S., CCC-SLP  
August 22, 2018

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#### Who Is E-Therapy

##### E-Therapy's Leadership Team 20 Years Of Teletherapy Experience



Diana Parafiniuk, CMO & Founder



Sara Smith, Lead Product Manager

- ❖ E-Therapy is a national leader in Teletherapy
- ❖ Providing Related Services since 2009, including:
  - ✓ Speech Therapy
  - ✓ Counseling/Social Work
  - ✓ Occupational Therapy
  - ✓ Physical Therapy
- ❖ E-Therapy has many years experience providing intervention and related services providing childhood education throughout the United States.



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#### Who Is E-Therapy: Our Reach



200,000+ Teletherapy Sessions



1000s Of Students



- ❖ E-Therapy provides services across the country
- ❖ E-Therapy serves all types of schools and students
- ❖ Therapists have state licensure & background checks

We Work At 100s Of Schools



100s Of Therapists



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**POLL**

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Welcome / Today's Goal



**GOAL**

*Provide an overview of what teletherapy is, the pros and cons, & why technology is a good solution for students with Autism. We will also examine tools and strategies for working with students with Autism.*

- ✓ **Why Early Intervention is Important**  
We will discuss teletherapy, the issues PreK students with Autism face, and how technology/teletherapy activities (over the computer) support communication skills for children with Autism.
- ✓ **How Teletherapy Benefits Students with Autism**  
Learn the benefits of Early Intervention for Students with Autism
- ✓ **Learn Strategies To Support Teletherapy**  
Learn Teletherapy strategies that support speech/language therapy and other therapy services for children in your Early Learning Program ages 3 to 5

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What is Autism?



**AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER**

**What is Autism?**

*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can affect social communication and behavioral development. ASD is a spectrum disorder which means that each child is affected differently and has unique strengths, challenges, and needs. ASD begins before the age of 3 and lasts throughout a person's life, although symptoms may improve over time.*

*Early identification of ASD is important so children and families can attain the services and support they need as soon as possible. With awareness, acceptance, and the appropriate supports, children with ASD can reach their incredible potential.*

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### 5 Potential Signs of Autism in Early Childhood Students



*Do you have students in your program that display these characteristics?*

1. Sensitivity to lights and sound
2. Lack of play skills
3. Difficulty participating in group activities
4. Lack of eye contact
5. Difficulty understanding emotions

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### Why Early Intervention is Important

#### Why is Early Intervention Important?

#### Early Intervention



- Brain is most capable of change in the early developmental stage
- Sets students up for future success in the classroom
- More effective and less costly than delayed intervention
- Improves academic and social outcomes as well as quality of life
- Improves challenging behavior and group learning skills

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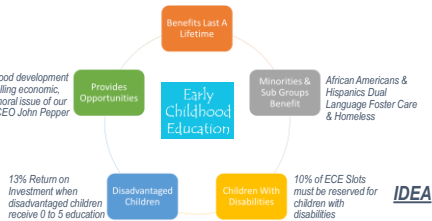
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### Important Early Childhood Impacts

*"Early childhood development is the compelling economic, social, and moral issue of our time," P&G CEO John Pepper*



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# POLL

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Shortage of Services for ECE Students with Autism

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**49 states:**  
Special education teacher and staff are in shortage.

**Did You Know...**

- 49 States report a shortage of Related Service specialists
- 1 in 59 students have Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Autism is the fastest growing developmental disorder, but the most underfunded
- 82% of Special Education Teachers report there are not enough teachers to meet the needs of students with IEP's.
- 51% of all school districts and 90% of high-poverty schools report having difficulty finding highly qualified SPED teachers.
- Early Intervention programs are some the most severely impacted.

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Teletherapy is a Great Solution

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**chicken**

**Connecting Therapists to Students in Need**

- Teletherapy connects therapists to students in need!
- By eliminating the limitations of location we can immediately find therapists who are available to serve students in programs across the country.
- Teletherapy has been proven to be just as effective as in-person therapy.

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### Defining Teletherapy



#### What is Teletherapy?

Teletherapy involves the delivery of Speech, Social Work/Counseling, Occupational and Physical Therapy services online via two-way video conferencing (or video chat). Teletherapy links live, licensed therapists to schools and students who may otherwise have difficulty receiving services. Teletherapy is being used in the assessment and treatment of a wide range of disorders.

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### What Does A Speech Teletherapy Session Look Like

## Video Teletherapy Session

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### Pros and Cons of Teletherapy

#### Pros

- Teletherapy allows for students to have services who wouldn't otherwise have access to therapists.
- No commuting time, therapists can see students back to back either in the classroom, or in the privacy of their own home.
- Teletherapy engages students in fun and meaningful ways.



#### Cons

- Teletherapy is a different modality and requires schools to work outside their comfort zone.
- Technology can be unpredictable so services could be interrupted on occasion.
- Early Learning Centers need to provide an aide to assist in therapy.

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### Teletherapy - A Not-So-Big Technology Evolution

- ❖ Teletherapy is a very simple technology today
  - Works on legacy computers
  - Doesn't require high bandwidths
  - Everyone is comfortable with streaming video on phones/PC/tablets—think Facebook, Netflix, Facetime, and many more!
- ❖ You really just need: a basic computer, webcam, & headset



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### Digital Immigrant Versus Digital Native

#### Digital Native Digital Immigrants



- Importance of The Digital Native
- ❖ New Form Of Communication
  - ❖ New Achievements
  - ❖ Expand New Opportunities



Mark Prensky, On The Horizon, MIT University Press, Vol. 9, No. 5, 2001

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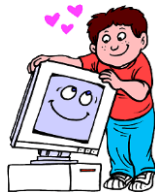
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### How Computers Help Students with Autism

#### Benefits of Computers for ASD Students

- ASD students use computers to learn **emotional recognition**
- Evidence suggests that special-needs software programs help individuals improve in academics as well as **social and communication skills**
- Technology helps students with ASD develop a **positive self-image** and **improved self-esteem**



\*Cited Sources  
The Guardian <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/feb/26/computer-geeks-autism>  
NCBI Study <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23131110>  
EMSTI Study <http://www.gmat.com/Importance-of-Computer-Aided-Education-for-Children-with-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-73267-0-2.html>

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### Specific ECE Students with Autism Teletherapy Examples

From E-Therapy SLP Vivian:

*Max (name changed) was a super cute 4 year old diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. He could yell and laugh but was non-verbal. Initially, Max had very limited attention skills, and his mom reported that he would have multiple meltdowns each day. Small things would set Max off, and outings in the community were very difficult. He rarely tolerated being around anyone other than his parents and siblings. During teletherapy Max began to make progress in his ability to pay attention. He also began to imitate mom and me during practice with animals sounds. He loved to do animal activities during the therapy sessions and learned to sing along with "Old MacDonald's Farm". Max continued to improve in his ability to express himself, and as his communication improved his meltdowns began to decrease. Max's mom was thrilled when he was able to stay for church with minimal meltdowns. Overtime he was able to sing the ABC's, identify increasing vocabulary items- including some animals , numbers, and colors. He developed the ability to request preferred food items, and at last report was able to make complete sentences!*

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### Specific ECE Students with Autism Teletherapy Examples

From E-Therapy SLP Jill:

*When I started with E-Therapy two years ago, I was assigned to work with Jessica (name changed). Jessica has autism and was primarily non-verbal except for imitating single words on occasion. She had a goal from her previous school to attend to task for two minutes at a time. As someone who was new to teletherapy, I have to admit that in the back of my mind I was thinking, "Can this format really work for this student?" When we began working together Jessica would take a movement break every few minutes during our sessions, but in just our 4th session together she stayed at the computer, sat, and attended for the entire 30 minutes. It was amazing! Now, in our 3rd school year working together, Jessica consistently attends and participates for all 30 minute sessions. We have worked up to spontaneous utterances of 4-5 words in length. Jessica will greet me by name and say goodbye with just a small cue, and it melts my heart. So... can teletherapy work for a student like Jessica? YES! The technology/game/interactive format we provide is so motivating and engaging for our students, and most of all effective!*

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### Tools and Strategies for Working With Students with Autism

#### ❖ Basic Social Skills

- ❖ Daniel's Tea Party: This game can be utilized to target basic social skills, such as turn taking and thinking of the needs of others.
- ❖ <http://pbskids.org/daniel/games/tea-party/>



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Activity Examples

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Website Demonstration

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Tools and Strategies for Working With Students with Autism

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❖ **Appropriate Interactions**

- ❖ Elmo's School Friends: This activity helps students work through social scenarios they might encounter during center time/group play at school.
- ❖ <http://pbskids.org/sesame/games/elmos-school-friends/>



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Activity Examples

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Website Demonstration

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Tools and Strategies for Working With Students with Autism

❖ Facial Expressions

- ❖ Robby the Robot: Therapists can utilize this game to help young students with Autism identify emotions and the corresponding facial expressions.
- ❖ <http://www.whizkidgames.com>



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Activity Examples

Website Demonstration

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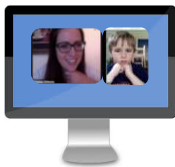
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Understanding Facial Expressions



- Use of the webcam during teletherapy sessions can facilitate practice with facial expressions
- You can practice in the same way using a mirror in the classroom setting

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Tools and Strategies for Working With Students with Autism

❖ **Incorporation of AAC onsite and/or onscreen**

- ❖ Many students with Autism utilize a communication device or picture cards to facilitate their expression, and this can be incorporated into the sessions.
- ❖ If the student has a device they can simply use the buttons on the device to communicate during the session.
- ❖ The therapist can also use icons on the screen to help the student learn basic communication skills.



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Activity Example

Website Demonstration:

<https://www.funbrain.com/pre-k-and-k-playground>

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Activity Example

Website Demonstration:

<https://play.thomasandfriends.com/en-us/videos/sing-along-thats-what-friends-are-for.html>

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Tools and Strategies for Working With Students with Autism

The therapist can help the student to expand their communication with other visuals, such as "I want..."



or



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Tools and Strategies for Working With Students with Autism

❖ **Targeting Functional Vocabulary**

- ❖ The therapist can utilize real pictures from the student's classroom to practice labeling items that are functional for daily routines.
- ❖ The teacher/aide can take snapshots and shoot them to the therapist in an email. Then the therapist can use the pictures onscreen during sessions.

Blocks



Crayons



Books



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Tools and Strategies for Working With Students with Autism

❖ **Comprehension & Following Directions**

Standing in Line



Sit Criss-Cross



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Benefits of Teletherapy

- **Use of on-screen visuals:** No need to print, cut out, and laminate picture cards. Updating and changing the visuals is easy with digital pictures.
- **Facilitate eye contact:** Teletherapy can reduce the level of pressure because the person is not physically there in front of the student, which can facilitate eye contact.
- **Motivating Activities:** ECE students with Autism can be difficult to engage, and they are often very motivated to participate in computer activities!

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Telepractice and Autism

Case Studies

- University of MA, Amherst did two case studies on the difference between receiving teletherapy and table top therapy for students with Autism.
- In both instances Teletherapy proved more effective than table top therapy.
- Clinicians reported that during Teletherapy ASD Students maintained higher levels of focused attention.



\*Cited Sources  
 NCTM <http://teletherapy.pitt.edu/cgi/indext.php?teletherapy/article/view/5104/6405>

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Teletherapy: Journal Findings Table Top vs Telepractice

International Journal of Tele-Rehabilitation, 3 Year Study



Key Finding:  
 ❖ Children who received speech therapy via telepractice achieved the best outcomes, even out-performing the national benchmarks for children from similar diagnostic and demographic backgrounds.

Teletherapy Results

• Copyright © by The Center for Health, the progress of children who received either in-person "table top" therapy or telepractice speech therapy from the same Wake County General Hospital (WCGH) in 2009.  
 • These outcomes were derived using three years of cumulative National Outcomes Measurement System (NOMS) Functional Communication Measure data (NOMA, 2012).  
 • <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/journals/telepractice/PDF/050613.pdf>

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ECE Teletherapy Session

Video Demonstration Actual Session

43

Horizontal lines for notes

# POLL

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Horizontal lines for notes

## Do You Face Service Provider Issues In Your Program?



(show of hands please ☺)  
(Folders)

- ✓ Do you have Service Providers (SLPs, OTs/Pts, Mental Health Counselors, other...) come into your program and work with your children?
- ✓ Do you have enough service providers to serve your students within your early childhood program?
- ✓ If you don't have adequate services or no services or limited services what does your program do?
- The Teletherapy Option?
  - ❖ What it is?
  - ❖ How can it be useful?
    - Expand your access to licensed professionals who can support your students in your program
    - Provide students with services they need
    - Other????

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Horizontal lines for notes

Teletherapy, Key Strategies For Setting Up Your Program

1 Set Expectations

2 Commit Resources

3 Know Documentation

4 Choose Proven Provider

5 Open Communication

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Teletherapy, Key Strategies

1 Set Expectations

- Understand how Teletherapy will work with your program
- Know what you want to get out of using Teletherapy

2 Commit Resources

- Time
- People/Staff/Technology required
- Getting the Program launched on the "right" foot

3 Know Documentation

- IEPs, Progress Reports, Evaluations, Therapy Notes, etc...
- Student Referrals

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Teletherapy, Key Strategies

4 Choose Proven Provider

- Demonstrated Teletherapy track record-References/Referral
- Already works in your state
- Strong industry reputation
- Provides a customized solution to meet your program's needs
- Resources/Make a commitment to your program: easy to work with; reporting, billing, dedicated account management, online access to see all therapy being provided

5 Open Communication

- Have regular check-in meetings -make sure your provider is checking on the quality of the program and services
- Speak with provider openly and straightforward
- Provide feedback

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Thank You / Q&A



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**E-Therapy**

Autism and Teletherapy -  
How Teletherapy Can Support Communication Skills  
for students with Autism in ECE.

[www.electronic-therapy.com](http://www.electronic-therapy.com)  
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