

Erica teletherapy

Michelle Andrews: [00:00:00] Hey there. I'm Michelle Andrews and I'm your host for the Pep Talk podcast. This episode is about how to do virtual speech therapy in the schools. Most, if not all of us, were thrown into teletherapy when the pandemic hit, but that was chaos and unplanned. This is not what expected and thought out.

Teletherapy really looks like We are gonna talk all about how you can enjoy teletherapy. My guest speaker today is Erica Capi. Erica is an SLP with over 20 years of experience in all aspects of the field, from birth to three to end of life, from homes to schools, to skilled nursing facilities. However, she has found her niche in the world of teletherapy. She has worked as a virtual SLP for several different companies, including with students at home, in virtual schools and in brick and mortar schools. She works at a private company called Universe and has a few teletherapy clients there at her current role at P D Ss. [00:01:00] That is pediatric developmental services. She has been a full-time SLP, but is transitioning into a new role as a coordinator of virtual services. She is the point person for P D Ss TE Tele therapist and will help with onboarding, training, problem solving, and building community. I have Erica here with us today to share some of her wisdom and experience about Teletherapy. First, we need to go over some formalities for the course by going over our financial disclosures. My financial disclosures include, I have a Teachers Pay Teachers Boom, learning and Teach with Medley store under pep talk LLC. I'm also the founder and manager of the Pep Talk podcast. My non-financial disclosures include Speech Arcade is an in-kind sponsor for this podcast. Erica's financial disclosures include, she is an employee of pediatric developmental services. has no non-financial disclosures to report. Okay. Now here are the learner objectives for this course. Explain best practices [00:02:00] for scheduling virtual speech therapy sessions. Give three examples of how to engage children in teletherapy. Explain key factors to consider when looking for virtual speech therapy positions. Okay, let's get started. Today we are talking all about teletherapy in the schools. You can do it and you can like it. I have recently talked with many SLPs who have transitioned to teletherapy. And the ones I've talked to myself are loving it. I am so excited to introduce today's guest speaker, Erica Capal. Hi there, Erica.

Track 1: Hi,

I am so glad to be here today. Um, as Michelle said, my name is Erica Capi. I have been a speech therapist for over 20 years and I've kind of done it all. Um, I

really love the field of speech pathology and I'm so appreciative that we are in a field that's. So highly in demand in all the different aspects of it.

Uh, I started teletherapy as some of you, [00:03:00] um, you know, during C O V I D and I had good success with the students who participated. Um, but I also have used teletherapy as part of school aged therapy, early intervention preschool sessions, um, and home-based other sessions as well, uh, with younger kids, especially birth to three toddlers.

I work with the kids, but essentially I'm training the parents there. Uh, I have also done home-based outpatient teletherapy with the elderly. That's kind of how I really fell in love with Teletherapy was a workers' comp injury where I was traveling between clients and a deer ran in front of my car, so I couldn't actually go to work.

So I was forced to do teletherapy and I

actually really loved it and thought this is an awesome connection. And then as I,

um,

was moving forward and thinking about my career path, I decided that no, I actually just wanna stick with teletherapy. So that's how I kind of transitioned fully into that. [00:04:00] Um, and I really love it and I don't really

see myself going back to in-person

services.

Michelle Andrews: services.

Track 1: Uh, it's just such a, a neat and more flexible way to really still reach and, um, help the, the clients, you know, whether they're students or or patients or whatever, help them improve. So I started with P D Ss and have been really help

happy with them

as

a company.

Michelle Andrews: That's awesome. That's actually what I hear the most is that people that really kind of get into teletherapy these days, I've heard a lot of SLPs say, I don't know if I'm gonna go back to in-person. I, once I really have teletherapy down This is my thing. I love it. And you know, I can be in pajama pants and I can eat lunch at home.

And it's, it's awesome. They They seem to really like it. ,

Track 1: I know it sounds silly, but just even being able to,

you know, turn, turn on the dishwasher or throw in a load of laundry, [00:05:00] uh, it takes maybe 30 seconds or something, but it, it's just a different feel and feels like there's a lot more work-life balance. And I think that as SLPs, that's always something that we struggle.

You know, we we're there for our patients and students and everything, and we really put our heart and soul into therapy,

but we also need to often take care of our houses and things like that. So I found that it, that teletherapy offers a lot more of that balance.

Michelle Andrews: yes, I think that might be what a lot of SLPs are, are referring to when they're saying how much they love it. You know, there's also the aspect of loving the actual teletherapy, uh, sessions, and then also all the other benefits of being wherever you wanna be at home, you know? Yeah. Like you said, putting a load of laundry in, you know, something that you just couldn't do if you had to drive 20 minutes to work or. Drive anywhere to work. , so let's get into a broad picture of what teletherapy looks like today. , what would a typical day, [00:06:00] week look like for a tele therapist?

Track 1: Okay, sure. Um, I would have to say that it really does depend on the position.

Um, even with districts and even within particular schools, if you're assigned there, uh, there are virtual positions now for just about every aspect of the field at this point.

And as Michelle and I have shared, I've done many of them,

Uh, but there

and there's benefits and perks to pretty much everything, but

I'm partial to the, the virtual services and brick and mortar schools. So in those jobs, you're basically a school s l p, doing your job virtually. So you would follow a schedule very similar to if you were . Uh, school, s l p. So you may have certain days that are more geared towards therapy.

Uh, maybe you have certain days that are i e p days or, um, you know, if kids have different activities at different times, you, you kind of work around that. Um, but for the most part,

I would say it, [00:07:00] it depends on the school

and some other factors, including the, the support staff there at the school to help with, with any sessions.

Michelle Andrews: Okay. That's helpful insight of just kind of some basic day to day. Um, before we dive into the specifics of direct virtual therapy, let's go over some common terms used. Um, I know I'm in lots of Facebook groups and the terms direct therapy and indirect therapy are thrown around a lot. Just let's make sure that everyone fully understands what that means. Can you describe to us the difference between the two?

Track 1: Yes. I'm glad you brought that up because that is a question that is often asked, and I'm often clarifying. Uh, back at the start of the pandemic, a lot of times we heard of synchronous and asynchronous. So in that kind of mentality, the, uh, synchronous would be more the direct therapy where students are live, uh, with you doing sessions and, and everything like that.[00:08:00]

In that situation that would be on Zoom or Google Meet or whatever platform, uh, was being used at the time. Asynchronous therapy. In that kind of pandemic time is would be more the indirect. So that would be kind of the speech work that's done on the person's own time. And like the SS l P might assign students some other form of speech work that could be done at their convenience.

So like assigning different boom cards or Flipgrid videos or written assignments that somehow targeted the person's speech goals. Anything like that, that would be kind of indirect. But nowadays it's a little bit different. So the terms direct and indirect are often used when some contract companies try to differentiate your pay based on whether or not you are making money for the company or it's doing a different part of the job.

So if you're making money for them, that would be the direct service. And the indirect service would be like the other parts of the job, like writing IEPs and things like [00:09:00] that. Um, indirect service would include important things like logging, session notes, writing IEPs, attending meetings, scoring and preparing evaluation reports, et cetera.

Um, sometimes companies do, depending on their contract with the district or the school or the company, whatever, um, they might not get paid for that. It might be more of a fee for service situation, and that's where there's kind of that breakdown. So, um, the direct services obviously are your, your speech time that you're actually providing therapy doing an evaluation.

Uh, so obviously these things are really still important factors and parts of being an I an S L P. Um, so I know I'm not alone in thinking that we should receive the same rate for both direct and indirect services since they're both part of the job. So, I get that the company is not always paid for the indirect time, but these activities are so important to being a good [00:10:00] s l P.

Um, and whether you're doing teletherapy or not, that's still very important. So unfortunately, some companies make you nickel and dime your time and write out how you spend all of your time in each day, and you know how many direct sessions you've done and for who and how much indirect time you've spent, how many times you've, you know, like how much time you've spent responding to emails.

And there's a lot of back and forth. And I just find that a big waste of time. You could be preparing therapy materials and, you know, for doing continuing ed or doing

anything else more productive than, than that. Um,

and then especially if they're trying to pay you less for that indirect time. I just, that makes me sad to hear because it's really all part of

The job. And, um, so I'm just so thankful that p d s, the company I work at, uh, trust that its employees will use their time appropriately to do their job and just do it well.

Michelle Andrews: that's awesome. That's really helpful to know when considering teletherapy [00:11:00] jobs, um, and when applying and looking around, um, and actually speaking to um, employers or to companies, um, to be

aware of, like, of what we should ask them, like to ask about that indirect time, ask about direct time and, what it looks like. That's really helpful to know. .

Track 1: Yeah, like at p d s, um, you're basically a, a school ss l p, so you're paid for the full day,

um,

you know, seven, seven hours or seven and a half hours,

whatever the school day is, regardless of whether you have one session, you have three no-shows. Uh, you, you know, are, have three valuations, five i e p meetings, whatever it is.

Um, or you're, you're spending the whole day writing up IEPs that's kind of on, you know, your, your ability to, Um,

To be able to take control of your schedule

in that way.

Um, and yeah, I would,

Michelle Andrews: would,

Track 1: I would caution,

um, you know, pe applicants , if they're, they're looking for teletherapy [00:12:00] jobs. If you hear those things about direct and indirect, it's a little bit of a, a red flag.

Like I would say at the very least, you wanna make sure that it's even compensation for both, or that there's at least some compensation for indirect pay that that works for you. Sometimes there's a higher direct rate and then a, a lower, um, indirect rate, but the, the direct rates higher than it would be.

So it kind of averages out. But if they're talking percentages, that's gonna just know that that's going to mean a lot more documentation of your time on, on your end.

Michelle Andrews: okay, what are typical percentages for indirect time versus direct time?

Track 1: So

I would say.

Michelle Andrews: I would say,

Track 1: I would say there aren't any typical ones because I think the real world doesn't work in typical percentages, . Um,

I know people have talked and specifically asked me, uh, like new, new hires and everything, what's the percentage? Blah, blah, blah. I said 70 30. [00:13:00] And I say it doesn't work that way.

Um,

Michelle Andrews: um,

Track 1: I don't know. It's, you can at least with p d s and I'm sure it's not the only company. You know, there are other good companies out there. Um, you know, of course I'm partial to p d s, but you know, there, there are other good companies out there that will pay people appropriately for their time and respect.

The fact that.

you, different therapists have different ways of doing it. So to kind of box people in makes it a little bit harder. Um, you could, this way you could have all of your sessions pretty much on one or two days of the week, and then you could set aside time for paperwork. Um, and then meetings.

And whatever. But again, it really depends on the school, the situation. I think the most important thing is that you do your job and you really do it well, and you, you know, it obviously, you're not going to see a whole bunch of patients and see them in groups of [00:14:00] five if that's not clinically appropriate.

You need to make sure that your, your students are making progress and you're targeting their goals and everything is clinically and ethically appropriate. And I think you, you should be pretty good to go, but there is kind of that flexibility

and, yeah, I would shy away from exact percentages because I don't, like I said, I don't think that's really very realistic.

Michelle Andrews: Right. I think because it, it'll really vary from week to week. I don't think it's like you always do 30% indirect or whatever, you know, I think it'll really, really change week to week or you know, what's going on. Sometimes you have a lot more evaluations. Sometimes you have more meetings. It, yeah, that, that makes a lot of sense.

Track 1: Exactly. Like exactly. Um, like even progress report time, obviously you're gonna need some extra time at that, like those weeks to, to evaluate your data and write out progress notes. So that's just a, a case in point.

Michelle Andrews: Yeah, [00:15:00] absolutely. So you mentioned, um, groups of five and just what might work and what really should be the best thing for each student. , let's get into talking about scheduling. Um, I know I worked at a school when you're in person, and I would say scheduling is difficult, probably no matter what, in person, in virtual, in how do you schedule for those virtual sessions and communicate with the teachers, all virtually,

Track 1: Also another very good question. Um, I think you would contact the school that you're assigned to and . Obviously trying to build rapport, uh, virtually is a little more challenging, but not always. Uh, sometimes people respond really well to electronic stuff, especially these days after the pandemic.

Everyone's used to zoom calls or things like that. Um, I think getting the buy-in from the school is important and that helps with the scheduling. So you'd have to contact the school [00:16:00] for the information on their school day and like their class periods and the bell schedule, all of that. When, when and when.

You cannot pull kids from, like, for speech. So some schools will let you pull kids at any time. Some just specials, some never from specials. It, it really depends. Um, and sometimes there's certain times like resource times that or things like that that are helpful and a, a good time like study, you know, a study hall period, something like that, where that would be

A great time to pull someone for speech because there's not really any learning time lost. So you, you wanna make yourself available. You want to reinforce your role as supporting the communication of the student in the school, and ultimately that's what we're looking for. So, uh, I try to be flexible with people's schedules as much as I can.

Um, some days you have to [00:17:00] really work around , um, you know, other people's schedules, and some days things can go perfectly as planned. Um, yeah. So often you need to work around your support person's schedule. So I, I think we'll probably talk about that, um, maybe in a, in a moment. But

for virtual charter schools,

Um, you might have a little bit more flexibility because some of those kids might be doing class asynchronous asynchronously so that they might be joining different times or just having to get schoolwork done. And so you might be able to see them anytime from, you know, 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM whatever. So there are flexible times like that, um, that those ones would be a little bit more accommodating in terms of really owning your schedule.

Typically those are 10 99 and typically those are fee for service, um, type positions where if, if the company gets paid for indirect time, [00:18:00] you might get paid for indirect time, but if they don't, your, their hands are a little bit tied as well. ,

Michelle Andrews: so you flowed

right into our next question about, a school providing a support person to get the children set up. Can you elaborate more on, uh, I guess the relationship between you and that support person and also just kind of how that works, how they help out getting the, the sessions going.

Track 1: Okay. Yeah. Uh, this is a key thing I think in Teletherapy and does make a big difference in success. Uh, you really need, as I said, the support of the school. So sometimes it's more helpful to have somebody at the school helping kids log onto their sessions, being a point person if there's, um, some issue with the computer or the mic or the camera, things like that.

So often the district or the school will provide somebody . To, uh, support teletherapy [00:19:00] and they can be called different things. I know in Maryland, even within the state of Maryland, there's ones that are called facilitators, instructional, uh, assistants. There's speech, ias, all different things, helper, speech helpers, whatever you want to call it.

Uh, that, that role is important because if a student can't log on, they're not gonna have access to their session. So that is important. It's also nice to have somebody kind of in the building hands-on if a kid starts having a behavior

issue or is playing with their computer keyboard, changing all the backgrounds, things like that.

Um, , you, those people are typically hired by the school. Um, unfortunately those positions don't always pay very well, and I think it's kind of a cushy job because they get to, um, . You know, sit there at least for like the older kids, it's more of a if needed position, [00:20:00] um, where they'll even call down, uh, to classrooms.

They won't even have to go get students. They'll just call and say, Hey, it's time for speech. And the students come down. The students pretty much log themselves on, and the IA is just there as kind of the person if something goes wrong. Um, however, I am not at all saying that I don't completely value their role.

Um, it is necessary and I think very, um, very important, and I think it's important to have that person put on a good face and also build rapport with the school. So you want to make sure that someone has a positive attitude if they are going to get students or whatever, uh, that they're going with a smiley face and everything that it really, they're part of the whole speech unit, um, you know, for teletherapy.

So I think that's important for success. We wouldn't want somebody kind of who's a little gruff, uh, to to be greeting [00:21:00] our students and make it so that the students would be less than happy to be coming to speech therapy. I've been blessed with a couple really great speech ias, um, this year, and been really nice.

Uh, previously I also had, um, some like, like the special ed secretary kind of oversaw that, so, or the kids would go to the library and the librarian would kind of be the point person. So it really depends. Um, who's available. and also, uh, this is kind of introducing another topic, but uh, you can also have support people provided by the more, uh, in the programs of the more intense kids, um, who need a little more support.

So like the regional AU autism programs, things like that. They typically have more, um, IA support on their, like in their program. [00:22:00] So they are the people who . often are great to come for speech therapy sessions or the teachers themselves. And honestly, I've had some really amazing, um, times with, with the speech or in the special ed teacher, uh, collaborating with me joining sessions and actually doing the sessions with the kids.

That has led to a lot of progress and I just think that's even the, the best, like that's better than somebody remotely sitting there just kind of hanging out, generally supporting. I would rather it be somebody in the child's life that sees them on a regular basis and um, helps them remember to use their good communication skills.

Sorry, that was kind of a lot

Michelle Andrews: No, that makes a lot of sense. And, having someone that is really good at facilitating that I think will go a long way.

And, , as an S L P, you know, Virtually even. We can encourage that and [00:23:00] whoever is hired for that role, for us, you know, we, we can probably give them suggestions about how to do things, um, how to get the kids involved and stuff if, if we need to.

Track 1: Yeah, I think it's really important for us as tele therapists to let everyone know how much we value them and their input. Um, you know, the, the ias especially who are, who are supporting the teletherapy, but also all of the

teachers and the principal and everybody, we are here to assist them.

And I think verifying and val, I mean validating, uh, their input and their concerns and everything, um, helps foster that team aspect. And I think that that's really important too. Creating a successful environment for tele therapists.

Michelle Andrews: Right. I love that. I think that's really true. Let's get into some of the common hiccups for teletherapy [00:24:00] and how to get past those. 'cause you know, we're gonna, there's gonna be times where, where we run into roadblocks issues. So what are some common ones and, and what are some solutions for that?

Track 1: Um, well,

I would say sometimes there's technical issues, obviously that's kind of one that that happens from, from time to time. I know, uh, some of my students recently there was testing going on. Um, so all the kids in the whole school were logged on for testing, so the internet was a little wonky. Um, but we, you troubleshoot it.

I usually try to have, um,

Michelle Andrews: um,

Track 1: like a, a texting relationship with

Michelle Andrews: with.

Track 1: The, the person who's at the school and kind of do that, or at least have like, contact with them so that they can, or they can email me or something, some way to contact them to say like, Hey, some, this is what's going wrong, um, I can't hear you or whatever.

Obviously with Zoom and [00:25:00] um, Google Meet and other platforms, there's ways to chat. So if for some reason the sound's not working, you have another way to, um, to communicate. A lot of times just logging off and logging back in can help, um, checking different settings. Um,

Michelle Andrews: Um,

Track 1: sometimes I've even had to

Michelle Andrews: to

Track 1: have the video

on because you're, you're supposed to have the video and the sound on when you're doing teletherapy, so I've had a phone sound with the video, you know, , so that it, it works that way.

Um,

yeah, you, you gotta be a little

creative.

Um, so I, I think that, that, that's just keeping, keeping a cool head with that. Every, you just go with the flow. Some people will be a couple minutes late for sessions. Some people will be very late for sessions. Sometimes you can extend the time, sometimes you can't.

Depends on what you have planned for the rest of the day. [00:26:00] I try to just keep in mind that everyone is doing their best and yeah, so you also

sometimes have scheduling issues where maybe your IA is only available one or two days a week. So if you have a decent sized caseload, you have to try to, for the most part, see all those kids during that time unless you have a backup way to see them.

So some . People are fine with being in the back of their classrooms and just having headsets and doing speech that way. That's not my preferred way, but, uh, it is an option. So that's something to consider if you only have support for a, a short period of your week or, um, uh, not your full week. I'll just say it that way.

But you just have to kind of prioritize your time. Group kids when you can, which I actually love. Uh, but yeah, you have to be pretty skilled in making sure [00:27:00] that a group session can, can work effectively. I think overall, the keeping in mind that you can tackle anything, just we're gonna make it work.

It's more of a problem solving thing, not, oh, this isn't gonna work. So keeping that mentality is, I think, key as well.

Michelle Andrews: Right. I love how you worded it, that we're all trying our best and, you know, sometimes there are things that are a little bit out of your control, but, you know, just do the next thing to try to help, you know, re restart it, re-log in, use, you know, think outside of the box, try to, try to work around it.

But, you know, for the most part, I, I assume probably the technology works, um, just whenever things do happen, um, just kind of troubleshooting that as best you can.

Track 1: Um. So I did also say that I had a couple really great ias. I did have some challenging support situations as well [00:28:00] in different jobs. And so I just wanna speak to that if I can for a quick second. Um, you know, again, I come from the philosophy of everyone doing the best they can.

Um, everyone is super overloaded and busy, and I get that. And all you can do is just document and advocate for yourself, um, and stay professional. And I would say if you are in a situation where things are not going great with the people who are at the school, then definitely loop in your, your company. I know p d s has been really awesome with me with regard to that and trying to advocate for me and everything.

So if you, um, I just would recommend staying professional and documenting, making things on email and whatever. Just keeping a record. Keeping a record too, if students are not coming to sessions. Uh, and why I also, for scheduling, I would really o [00:29:00] kind of over the top, like for each scheduled session, I would email the student, the teacher of the class that they're in, the tea, their case manager, and.

The, um, and the special ed coordinator so that everyone's in the loop. Everyone is knowing kind of what's going on. A couple times I, I had to cc the principal on things as well, so I would just say be transparent with everything. And again, your intentions of doing a good job are, should be a parent. I, I know we're, we're in this field because we love to assist people.

So, um, make sure that that's the part, that's the vibe that comes through, even if it's frustrating because you aren't at the school. So you are offering something that's very valuable and that the school needs, but it's not right in their face. So we may have to just be a little bit more of a gentle reminder.

Um, You know, of our presence there and say, okay, well when would be a great time to meet [00:30:00] and maybe set up a, a Google meet or a Zoom conference with the principal or the special ed people. Okay, let's try to work this out. What can we do to overall make this more successful? That kind of thing.

Michelle Andrews: Yeah. 'cause if you were physically at a school, you might knock on their door, pop in their office type of thing, or, you know, go into the classroom. Um, but yeah, I think being, uh, quick to do it in other ways, the zoom meetings, the Google meet or all, all those different ways to, to be able to talk face to face especially is probably really good.

And lots of emails, just having that communication, um, not just having something go wrong and not saying anything. Yeah. I think being very transparent, like you said, will go a long way with everybody involved. That's really important. Um, you touched on group sessions a little bit. That kind of goes into my next question. Um, I wanted to know about sessions. Are they one-on-one? Are they in group, uh, are they group sessions? How is that determined?

Track 1: Okay. Um, yeah.

[00:31:00] it really depends. Like most of these answers, uh, it really depends. You have to use your clinical judgment and also consider what resources you

have available. I actually prefer to have my kids in group because it's more real world, but sometimes individual is best, uh, because of the specific kid, the specific need, or just scheduling issues.

If only one kid could come at a certain time, , I pretty much try to make it work with whatever situation I'm faced with, but I do enjoy groups.

Michelle Andrews: Awesome. Yeah. So, since it is virtual and there, there are some limits of maybe seating or who all can see the computer, do you have, a limit of group size that you recommend?

Track 1: That's funny because I was just asked that question yesterday. So there is no set limit, I would say, as long as you are still being ethical and professional and you're meeting the kids' needs, if you're having a larger group, I would say it's very [00:32:00] appropriate to extend the time.

Uh, and you know, there, there was one situation where there was no support staff in a classroom that had a lot of needs. And So

I actually did a push in with the whole classroom. So I was up on the big screen. The kids took turns coming up, but I was able to still engage all of the kids throughout the session and have them, uh, participate.

Okay. Who likes whatever and keep their attention to the tasks, even if it wasn't technically their quote unquote turn. They were all still engaged with it. And I'm not no longer at that school and I miss those kids so much. It was such a great experience. Again, it was not ideal.

In the setup, but the kids all made progress and it was really special and ideal in a lot of other ways. So I think, you know, you can go in with the [00:33:00] mentality of this is not gonna work no way. Whatever. And actually, I thought that way, maybe about a, a c with teletherapy at first, and now I'm a huge fan of it.

So if you kind of educate yourself, you realize there's so much more that can be done with teletherapy. Um, and there there's not really the limitations if you, if you dive deeper. So if you keep asking why, uh, but so I would say depends on the setup in the room in terms of the, the size. If, if a place has a smart board and they can hear, then you could do something like that.

Or if you know it's a group of two, then maybe they could share a computer and have a single login. If it's a group of three or more, typically we have

headphones and their own district provided devices that they log into and kind of go from there. So [00:34:00] it really, it really depends. I.

Michelle Andrews: That's so cool that you even did a pushin session , with the whole classroom. I didn't even know that. Um, you could do that as well. That's really cool to hear. that you made the best of it. That's, that's awesome. So it sounds like, you know, you have so much experience with working with groups, um, in teletherapy. What are some more of your tips for working in groups?

Track 1: Sure. I just really try to engage everybody all of the time. So as I was talking about that, that big push in classroom, that was the exception. But, uh, like you just have to keep the kids on their toes. You let them never kind of take a break. They always have to be listening whether another person's answering a question or not.

So I'll have kids ask each other questions about their weekends or their interests, and then I will follow up and ask the question to the person who asked and said, so what did Johnny do for his weekend? And it's funny because how, [00:35:00] it's funny how often and a little concerning, I'll be honest, uh, how often kids will be like, I don't know.

So as soon as they asked the question, they tuned out. And so I think it's really important to kind of reinforce that skill, even at a conversational level. I do a lot of real world type things and always include that initial part of conversation, especially as kids are logging on. Uh, but I think it's so important, there's so much listening comprehension in a conversation and expressive language, obviously as well as pragmatic.

It's such a real world skill that targets communication. So I, there's no way I'm going to not take a little bit of time to do that. So I love when kids say, oh, when are we actually gonna start? I'm like, oh, we've been working on all of your goals this whole time, . So it's great. But I really like them to listen to each other.

Um, And as a team kind of build off of each other because that's what we're looking for. Those, those are [00:36:00] actual good communication skills, not it's, you're only on when it's your turn. So I keep them on, I'll have kids, um, maybe read a passage aloud. I might read it or give them a chance to read it if they're feeling like they need to be a little bit more engaged.

Um, or I may have someone who's working on articulation, read a passage that uses their target sound. So I may pull up like an rvo or R word, paragraph and

have them read that. And then I get data for their target sound, and then I will ask literal questions, inference questions, explanation of rationale, like how did you figure out that that's, you know, that it was raining outside?

That sort of thing. Uh, I'll use that same story for main idea, retelling the whole story and then prediction questions. And since no one knows who I'm going to ask what, when they all kind of have to be on the ball. So [00:37:00] I'll, and I'll ask, I will also ask the kids, what do you think? Do you disagree? Do you agree?

I'll even sometimes have them evaluate each other in terms of how they're doing with their particular goals, especially if it's a speech kid, um, and they're on the higher end, or I know that it's a . A good match between the kids especially. So before that, I go through everything of, you know, everyone's working on their own thing.

You know, we're all here for a reason. Some people are really good at this and some people are still working on that. These are your goals, you know, these are the things that we're working on. This is for the speech time only. It's not to, for you to go out outside the, the, uh, speech session and be like, Hey Joey, you didn't use your good T sound.

Things like that so that it's more in this particular environment, we are going to use this and we are encouraging everyone [00:38:00] to be supportive of each other. So I try to make that like a social piece as well and, and then kind of go there. So I, I might say, okay, thumbs up, thumbs down, or thumbs in the middle.

What do you think? And if you can't get to everybody, 'cause you don't wanna waste that much time, that's a way to get a kid involved. And gives the, the student who's trying, who might not know how they're doing. They, it gives them another person giving them feedback. And, you know, it's not too aggressive to see a thumbs up or thumbs down , you know, so

I, I think that that's a, a nice way to, to do that. Also, a quick, hey, so, there's a picture of a kid licking an ice cream cone. Uh, I'll have Marie say, the girl is licking an ice cream cone. And then I'm like, oh, great. You know,

or I'll, I'll modify it, say, what is she licking?

And we will work on wh questions, things like that. And then . For the person [00:39:00] who's maybe not actively engaged in that particular turn yet, I'll say,

so what's your favorite ice cream flavor? As I'm then going back to maybe a game that I'm playing with them. So again, keeping everybody involved so it's not like they're zoning out on that when it's not their designated turn.

It's always everyone's turn.

Michelle Andrews: That's so important. I think that's such great advice, especially for teletherapy. 'cause you really, you know, you're just in this box. You gotta keep 'em on their toes. Um, but that seems like good advice for, even if you're in person, that, you know, keeping them always ready. Always, always engaged. It could be my turn at any moment.

It is my turn. I have to be listening and involved. Um, I love that. And, and getting them to be involved. with feedback and things like that. And I love how you pointed out that it's just in speech, you know, not at lunchtime pointing it out to the kids. I think, you know, building that encouragement within, with the group of kids, I think that can be, that can be powerful with them too.

[00:40:00] Um, and of course, depending on everyone's personalities and making sure it's a good fit, like you said. But, , I like that. That's, that's really important. Um, so you had so many ideas for so many examples just now. Um, what about some other materials that you use in therapy? Can you tell me what, what type of things you use virtually?

Track 1: Sure. Uh,

I love personally, uh, ultimate s l p and use it very often because the games are easy and can be modified based on time. So you can kind of like, keep going quickly if you . You need to finish or you can draw it out more. Uh, but the card decks that go along with them are awesome. So you can address a whole bunch of different things.

But again, I modify activities so much. So I might pull up inferencing level one and use that for literal questions and main idea and story retell and inference, and you know, any of those other things. [00:41:00] So I, I think that it doesn't really matter the material as long as you're creative with how you're using it.

I think there are a lot of awesome other materials out there that I haven't necessarily looked at too much yet. Um, but I think any, any time, um, you know, if you have specific needs and you're looking for ideas, I think that's fantastic. I know there's some other wonderful resources like Michelle's stuff on Boom Learning and teachers Pay Teachers as well as Pink Cat games and speech Arcade, et cetera.

Um, yeah, like there's the, there's a whole list, , um, you know, the list can go on and on and new stuff is coming out every day. So I think it's really important, you know, to kind of stay fresh. You don't want your kids to get bored. If ever you feel like they're getting bored, you're gonna lose their interest.

So, um, I know there's some new video things as well out there. And [00:42:00] yeah, at p d s actually in my new role, I'm in the process of collaborating with all of the tele therapists and building a resource list for us to use. And at our first monthly chat, uh, we were able to kind of all share some of our favorite teletherapy activities.

And we actually have another monthly chat this evening. And so I guess it's late afternoon, but, um, monthly chat slash happy hour type thing. Uh, it's, it's really a, a time to build community and, you know, talk about some of the, the updates and things that, that people need to know, but also just build that rapport and connection we have, you can.

Get a lot of stuff for free or there's also some stuff, but I haven't seen anything that costs more than maybe \$12 or something like that. I think all the resources out there are incredible. It's just really what you are looking for for your particular students and what, what works with, with how [00:43:00] you're approaching therapy.

But in terms of assessments, that's another whole thing. Uh, a lot. I get a lot of questions about that. So there's Q Global, which is one of the main places that has virtual assessments, and if you ever log onto that, you'll see there's a ton, a ton, a ton of, uh, assessments listed there. But typically you have to buy the assessment and then you only actually have access to it if it's a, a purchase thing, and then it would go under a restricted, uh, folder.

And also w p s has the owls too, which I like as well. Um, so comp some companies, uh, you know, like p d s will, uh, pay for subscriptions to that and provide that for the therapist. Some school districts will do that. Sometimes the districts will provide the protocols. Sometimes the companies do. And here's the [00:44:00] alarming part is some companies expect the therapist to buy the assessments and provide the protocols, which is extremely expensive.

And I don't know. So I would caution anyone who's looking to sign on to ask about that. Um, because I I, that it's just so expensive and unless you're only doing evals and that's gonna make it work for, you know, make it worthwhile for you to spend that and economically that makes sense, uh, which it could for

some people, but, If you're only doing a couple evals a year or something, uh, yeah, that's, that's a lot of money.

So definitely make sure that you are set up with, with regard to assessments and also, you know, look for a company that will provide the training too. If you have never done a virtual assessment, it's not really that hard. I know it's very intimidating for people, but it's really just about having two screens next to you, or, I mean, not two screens, but [00:45:00] even like a split screen or two smaller windows on your same screen.

I don't have any fancy technology, even right now, I'm not even using an external mic. Um, just my, my MacBook Air and I, that's all I use for therapy as well, so, . Uh, you don't need to have anything extra. You can, and obviously the quality might be better and everything, but you can do things pretty minimally and add on as needed.

So I know that that's actually another, um, topic that I wasn't even thinking about.

Michelle Andrews: Yeah, that's, that's really helpful to hear all of that. Um, especially, yeah, with assessments, that's definitely something to note, to ask about. Where do I get assessments? Uh, is there a subscription that I can access? Things like that. That's 'cause Yeah, virtually, you know, we don't have the tests, you know, with us unless, um, the school provides it or, yeah.

Like the, a company is providing that. Um, that's really important to, to think about. What about,[00:46:00] crafts or things that maybe the aide or, , helper can assess with? Do you ever do things like that or is it mainly stuff on the computer? Do you do more like in person where you're asking the student to do something physically or maybe there is a board game in front of them, do you think do things like that as well?

Track 1: So that's an excellent question. And I would say that's more of a therapy specific

and helper specific question. so

I do know, uh, several therapists with tele therapists with our company who do that, and I think it's awesome.

I would say

it's

probably a little bit

more, uh, important for the younger or the lower functioning students to have more, um,

Like concrete things in front of them rather than just a screen. Although it's, it's amazing how the students with autism respond to teletherapy. I get much more eye contact and everything than I think I would be getting in person just because it's a [00:47:00] little bit less confrontational, if you will. Uh, so, but yes, I,

I

love the, the crafts and everything.

That has never personally been my strength. I would say I've always been more, even with the preschool age, more the books and the, the hands-on activity that's actions and moving and things like that. But for, uh, therapists who that's been, that's part of their thing, I think it's amazing and absolutely you can do that.

So that would be coordinating with the person who's there, uh, and sending materials ahead of time or working with whatever is in the real world there. I know. For like the birth to three, where, where the kids are in their home and everything. I, you pull whatever is there. You want it very functional and real world, so you could do anything like that.

I do have hands-on materials for like picture cards and things like that, as well as [00:48:00] snacks and things that I've sent to the school, um, to work with, with some of the lower, uh, communication kids as well. So yeah, you, I mean, again, the sky's the limit. You just have to make, like, figure out how to make it work.

I, I know even some tele therapists have sent. Um, fidget toys and things to the school just to have that. I sent a piece of black poster board to cover the computer so that it's less, um, enticing, you know, they cover the keyboard to, so that it's less enticing for them to play with any of the, um, controls and change their screen backgrounds and all of that.

So I, I think really just being creative, but also just setting the expectations and if you have, you know, and, and know your audience. So know your students, whether that's gonna be a good thing. Know your, um, support people and

whether they're gonna be on board with that. You don't have to do anything in person.

There's a lot of fun, awesome things that you [00:49:00] can do online, including creating things, coloring, um, you know, but you don't need to do that. One other thing I wanted to mention, uh, that I often hear about is people saying, oh, I can't do that because the, the client doesn't have remote access. Or whatever.

Sometimes I think it's Chromebooks that you don't, you can't get remote access or something, um, with zoom. So, but the reason why I don't know is because it's never an issue for me because to me, I view that as a communication opportunity. I don't want them to have access to my screen necessarily.

I want them to be able to communicate what they want. So if there's a list of cars that they can pick, like for their game pieces, I want them to be able to verbalize not just this one, I want them to be able to say the color or the first one or the last one, that sort of thing. So I view it as a [00:50:00] communication opportunity.

I honestly have never had an issue with a student not having remote access. Because I've never really given it to them. And or if I have, it's only been in a very structured game. And I, I just think it, it, we're missing out on the opportunity for communication. Uh, if we just give them that 'cause then they, they get more freedom and whatever.

And also we can address skills, uh, by keeping it the way that it's,

Michelle Andrews: That's such a great point. I like that. Um, absolutely. It sounds like you can really do all of your favorite therapy materials virtually just, um, making a few tweaks sometimes, or accommodating certain aspects of it. But yeah, it sounds like, you know, you can still be the, the whatever your SS 1 p personality is, the kind of activities you really like to do and feel are most motivating for your kids.

Track 1: So,

yeah, actually I [00:51:00] just was at a conference and uh, the presenter was really great and I, I, as he was talking, I was like, yeah, I kind of approached speech therapy the same way. But his, um, his name was Eric Raj and he was talking about using video games and therapy as well.

And I've done similar things. And also the cool thing about teletherapy is if you're talking about something and the kid has no idea, you can pull up a picture of that. I mean, we just had that a with a, about a water slide, like the blow up water slides that somebody was talking about that. And I was like, oh, you don't under, like, you don't know what I'm talking about.

So we pulled up the visual and you can do creative things like that. You can have them share . You know, if they're really excited about Pokemon, you can kind of go that way and pull up images and, you know, make PowerPoints and things like that. So yeah, get creative with everything. It, um, you know, the sky is, is really the limit with, with all of that.[00:52:00]

So it's nice to be able, just like we would in conversation, pull out our phone to do like, research something as we're talking, oh, I wonder how many people, blah, blah, blah. Um, you know, you, you can have

the answers right there because you're not pausing therapy to do that. You're taking them, you share your screen, you're, the kids are with you on the journey.

They're learning search school search skills that also help them learn, you know, vocabulary and ways to figure out what, what things mean and what they are. So you're, you're building so many skills just by doing your normal thing, uh, which I think is really cool.

Michelle Andrews: Absolutely. That's that's very true. So these are awesome activities and I love how we really went through how, you know, you could really do anything, um, which is really, really awesome and encouraging for anyone that's interested in teletherapy. You know, that you don't, you don't have to just do one type of therapy.

You can get creative. Um, but we all know we're gonna [00:53:00] have those distracted students. And I wanna hear about your tips for us on that. Um, what are some tips you can give us for those Keeping those distracted students engaged.

Track 1: So I like to just keep things moving. Um, I'll call on them just like if they were in the classroom, you know, a, a good teacher would keep them actively engaged, would kind of bring them, be closer to them. I've texted my IA during the session like, Hey, I think so-and-so's playing on their, on the computer.

And she'll go over and kind of like, sit closer or whatever. So having that in person. . Uh, person there that can, the hands-on is helpful in, in that regard. Uh, I think clarifying expectations overall is really important. Listen, hey, I see you're playing with the background. Um, that's really cool. I love San Francisco.

You know, that's usually the pick that they do, or, I love, I love Florida and the palm trees. Awesome. I wish I was there too. Yes. Um, but we're gonna focus on our speech stuff and then at the end of our session, [00:54:00] the last minute, how about we, I'll let you do that and you can, I don't know. I have one kid who just loves the fake little eyebrows that, that moves around.

So, I mean, I try to acknowledge the . The point of it where maybe they're just create, you know, they're just exploring. And so I try to recognize that and either give them another minute with, with whatever it is that they're doing, and then we switch and we put it away or put it at the end. And then I, I try to actually make sure that they get the time to share that or, um, to, to do that because that's meaningful.

And I found that after that time, they don't really need to do that the next session. They're, they're much more engaged. So I, I think again, with the groups, keeping them, um, on top of things and never knowing when they're gonna get called on and making them like, you know, pay attention is, is really the most important.

Michelle Andrews: Okay. Yeah, that's, that's really helpful. And I like how you worded it where, you know, that's [00:55:00] meaningful to, to them and that might give them a great communication opportunity to talk about something that was grabbing their attention and that they were interested in. You know, those real life examples that, that I know you keep, um, pointing towards So teletherapy is just sounding awesome. I, it's actually something I really have been researching recently, um, personally. , let's talk a little bit about those teletherapy jobs. What are ways to get a teletherapy job in the school? I know we've talked about, um, p d s and the company that you know so much about. Um, but how does that work? And are, are schools mostly open to a virtual speech therapist or do some really want in person? that work?

Track 1: So

I would say

Michelle Andrews: say,

Track 1: yes there, the, the open, they're becoming more and more open, especially since Covid, unless they've been, um, traumatized a little bit by, by the Covid thing. Because as we talked about at the very beginning, we were all [00:56:00] pretty much thrown in and nobody knew what they were doing. So

while some schools, I mean

actually the school, the school district that I work at, um, now, they had

Teletherapy from before Covid. So you will find those schools that, that really have embraced that. Uh,

a lot of times, I think because our field is so in need that they'll accept it. You know, they recognize, Hey, we have such a shortage. I know there was another district that I worked at and the very first day of the trainings, they were ecstatic that there were only 80 different, um, 80 speech positions left unfilled, 80

So

it was, it's one of those things that it's very, very much needed. Um, but we have to be mindful when we take it on that we're going to be doing it right and encouraging it. [00:57:00] You know, and promoting teletherapy and not emphasizing the restrictions and everything. Like again, that problem solving approach of how are we going to make this work?

Um, and in fact in our meeting, uh, later today, I'm going to talk to the current p d s tele therapist about, okay, what can we do with the, you know, how can we better the in-person support situation and do we really need it? How could we make it better? What could schools do? And kind of broach that subject because I do feel like that's, um, an area that, that impacts us.

And, and everything impacts pay a little bit too, if, if, uh, schools are thinking, okay, well, not only do I have to pay for a therapist, I also have to pay for some, like an assistant. And so that kind of is a factor that at least schools are, are looking at. But I know, I mean obviously there's contract companies out there, uh, a whole bunch of 'em.

Um, some are run by s l p, some are are huge and take a [00:58:00] big cut. Some of 'em, you know, are, are quality and, and awesome. Um, so there, that's an easy way to do that. Then they line you up with the jobs and, or you can also contact the school district and contract with them directly. I, I've never done that.

That's a little nerve wracking to me unless I knew exactly the district and everything, the situation. I personally like working for a company because I know if one thing doesn't work out that there's gonna be other options. Uh, and so I think that, that, that's sort of a good move and not bad. Especially if you are new to the field.

I think also taking, if you've never done teletherapy, besides covid, taking on a case or two is a great way to kind of get your feet wet, build that experience, figure out whether it's something you enjoy [00:59:00] or not. It's a, a great way to just have a couple extra the in like sessions and earn some extra income that's maybe an hour or two and you can make a nice little, um, chunk of change for, for that if you add that to maybe, if you're already a school s l p and you're just thinking that maybe you might wanna do teletherapy in the future.

So there are definitely companies, um, like that and I can, I can help connect you with that 'cause I have, um, some experience with those as well. So, yeah, but I personally have been happy with my situation. I've worked for a couple different companies and I've finished out my contracts and, and everything.

And you kind of learn what you're looking for and what's a good match. Um, I would just say like, yeah, make sure you're, you're researching the company and the support that they'll be giving you, uh, in terms of, of everything and not make sure that they're not gonna just leave you high and dry. 'cause [01:00:00] that's kind of tough, especially as a tele therapist, that, that feeling of being alone or learning a whole new system and not having somebody to walk down the hall too, that can be a little bit, um, intimidating.

I would say.

Michelle Andrews: Right. Yeah. Finding a company that

has built a community, kind of like what you've said that your company has, where y'all have meetings and, you know, you don't feel alone. I think whether you're in person or virtual, sometimes the school ss l p can feel alone. Really having that community, having SLPs and o others to chat about their experiences and bounce ideas off of, is so valuable.

Track 1: And I really think, um, as one of my main contacts at, at p d s says Teletherapy is here to stay. Uh, it was, it was in place before the pandemic and it's just gonna continue, you know, that we are all in, in need in the field. So there are going to be more and more opportunities I think.

Michelle Andrews: Absolutely. Well, this has been awesome. I've [01:01:00] learned so much, and I really think that our listeners have really gotten a great picture of teletherapy and what it's like and how to navigate that. This has been incredible. Um, I just wanted to see if you had one last closing statement or a pep talk for our listeners.

Track 1: Okay. Um, yeah,

as Michelle stated at the beginning of this podcast, like during C O V I, we were all just thrown in to providing virtual services, and now more and more people are choosing it. It's more flexible and it's, you know, in, in a lot of ways has a lot more positives than in-person, uh, services.

Each person . It has to do what's right for them and find their, their fit. But I, I do value teletherapy and I'm actually thankful to Covid for, for bringing it into, you know, more of the limelight and everything so that it is more widely accepted. So, and if I could just say one more thing about what [01:02:00] to look for and not look for in a teletherapy position.

Um, I mentioned being paid for direct and indirect at the same rate. Um, the rate itself, I know sometimes like, people are appalled, not appalled because it's really not appalling. But, um, I would say sometimes people look at the rate and think that seems a little bit low, but the, it's . When you factor in all of the other considerations, like the time to get to your job time, you'd have to take off if you needed to be home for like the furnace person or any special delivery, um, the price of gas these days, having to worry about anything more than your shirts because you can wear sweatpants or paja pants, , uh, shoes even, you know, things like

Yeah, exactly. You don't, you don't need to have, um, you know, the fully polished to look. You have more time, [01:03:00] uh, and other perks. From a company that may offer reimbursement for licensing, Asha dos, um, continuing ed, things like that. When you factor all of those things in, you can actually do really well. And I mean, here's an another example.

So you could be doing your virtual job, like your virtual school job, and the time that you would be spending in traffic coming home, you could take on another case or two virtually, and you could be earning money during that time instead of, um, fighting traffic. So, and using money to pay for gas. So, you know, it, it.

It makes me, you have to think about the big picture, I think is, is my main point there. And you know, some companies offer benefits at 30 hours, including

health, dental, vision 401k, um, with Company Match even so there, the good companies are out there. You just have to kind of find one [01:04:00] that feel that fits right and feels good to you, and one that's supportive of you as a professional and also, you know, as a person, somebody who values you.

So I think having that feeling of being valued and also having supports in place for training is, is important. And, you know, I think it's, it's a good thing. Those are good things to keep in mind, uh, when you're looking for a job.

Michelle Andrews: I love that. That There's so much that goes into it. You know, a lot of times there are just like the hours, the rate, um, you know what, what if it's W two or 1099? Um, but there are a lot of factors that, that go into it to like ask more questions and, and see what other benefits and other other positive things that, um, that, that that company may bring as well. Thank you for listening. We hope you learn something today. All of the references and resources throughout the episode are listed in the show notes and also listed on the Pep Talk podcast for SLPs website. [01:05:00] If you want to learn more about Teletherapy from Erica, you can email her at erica@pdsstherapy.com. Erica, thank you again for joining me here today.

Track 1: Thank you, Michelle. It's been my sincere pleasure and I hope that this podcast is helpful for anyone considering the move to Teletherapy. If anyone has any other questions, yeah, feel free to email me. Uh, erica PDSs therapy.com. Uh, it's probably obvious by now that I really do love this field and I'm passionate about how others, so I look forward to connecting with you.

Thank you for your time.