TelePBS – Are you ready and able?

Practitioner Guide

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# What is TelePBS?

TelePBS is the delivery of Positive Behaviour Support via telepractice.

*Telepractice* is the delivery of services at a distance. While face to face videoconferencing is the goto for many practitioners, telepractice can also include:

* audio only videoconferencing
* chat box only videoconferencing
* telephone
* text messaging
* emailing
* or a combination of any of these.

Telepractice is emerging in the literature as a quality service provision that is increasing access for people in rural and remote areas as well as a complement to in-person services.

*Positive Behaviour Support* (PBS) is a person-centred model of service used to improve quality of life and decrease behaviours of concern by teaching new skills and making changes in a person’s environment.

Positive Behaviour Support is the model of behaviour support promoted by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission when providing services to people with disability and their support teams in Australia.

# What makes a successful Tele Behaviour Support Practitioner?

Hot tip! Its not about your technology skills.

Technical skills can be learned over time, while soft skills are fundamental to delivering services online. These soft skills such as patience, understanding and empathy are important characteristics in any therapeutic relationship; however, these have been reported to be central to developing relationships through the screen. Allow time for pauses (no, it’s not my internet lagging!), reflection, and don’t forget the small talk.

Other characteristics that were found to support the Behaviour Support Practitioner’s development of skills when delivering TelePBS include:

* being flexible, creative, and open to learning new ways of working
* a positive attitude to technology and telepractice the ability to systematically work through technical issues
* the extensions of these new skills into in-person services

# Getting tech ready – Practice, practice, practice!

While technology skills come second to soft skills, being tech ready is still pretty high on the list. Our research has found Behaviour Support Practitioners report it is “simply a matter of getting used to it” with practice being key to success. Behaviour Support Practitioners who have not previously delivered services via telepractice will benefit from access to quality information on:

* technology hardware
* and software solutions,
* tips for setting up the
* videoconferencing space
* information on privacy,
* confidentiality, and
* informed consent.

A number of peak bodies have published guidelines outlining the use of technology for delivering allied health services including

* [Allied Health Professions Australia](https://ahpa.com.au/resources/?resource-cat=digital-health)
* [Speech Pathology Australia](https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/SPAweb/Resources_for_Speech_Pathologists/Professional_Resources/HTML/Telepractice.aspx)
* [Occupational Therapy Australia](https://www.otaus.com.au/member-resources/covid-19/telehealth)
* [Reimagine Australia](https://re-imagine.com.au/practitioner/telepractice/)

Getting tech ready for TelePBS however is also more than just reading these guidelines. TelePBS is an approach which requires a lot of collaboration and support team involvement in the assessment, planning and implementation phases of a behaviour support service. Where behaviours of concern exist, so too may multiple levels of complexity which may impact the support team’s ability to engage at a distance.

## Multiple methods

It is important to be open to multiple methods in the use of technology that respect and are tailored to the individual needs of each recipient. The recipient should have a choice

at all times over how they receive their TelePBS service and this may continually evolve throughout the life of the service.

## Choosing the technology

It is important to match the technology to the person’s preferences, access, and digital abilities. Once this is chosen however, you may still find yourself in the role of tech

support for your clients and families (!). Therefore, make sure you have your chosen platform’s access guidelines, troubleshooting documents, and support page ready to go.

## Screen sharing

Screen sharing is one of the most widely used and valued tools in the delivery of TelePBS. Screen sharing provides Behaviour Support Practitioners with the ability to:

* share documents and resources at the click of a button,
* develop resources together on screen such as social stories
* show support teams how their expert words are being incorporated live into the development of plans and strategies of support.

Practice makes perfect and it is a good idea to have a play around with your chosen platform to get used to switching between documents, your mirrored device, websites and back again.

## Connection test

A quick connection trial before starting sessions can also help support teams feel

confident coming in to the first session, and reduce the time wasted on technology issues that can affect the establishment of rapport.

# Considering the contextual fit

Telepractice is recognised as an important option in the delivery of supports. The increase in access to behaviour supports for all people with disability regardless of where they live must be maintained. However, it is important to conduct an appraisal of the TelePBS approach in the individualised context of each person and their support team.

The *“Is TelePBS right for me (and my child?) A participant’s guide”* is available for Behaviour Support Practitioners to read through with families, to appraise and make recommendations on the decision to include TelePBS in their supports, or discuss a plan to work towards this model of service in the future.

This guide is also useful for Behaviour Support Practitioners and families to come to a shared understanding of what TelePBS is and isn’t, the expected levels of involvement, and the availability of local support team members. This is a negotiated process and can be done verbally and supported via written communication.

We ask participants to consider the following questions to help them and/or your support team decide whether TelePBS is right for them at this time, or if an alternative or blended approach might better suit in their circumstances.

* What do I want to achieve?
* What is going on in my life right now?
* Could online supports work for me (and my child) at this time?
* Can I access a phone, a tablet or a laptop?
* Can you borrow a phone, tablet or laptop at your local school or community service?
* Consider applying for one with NDIS
* Do I have access to a stable internet connection with enough data?
* You may consider places such as a local school, library or local community services that offer free internet access
* How comfortable am I with technology? Am I open to learn and give it a go?
* Ask your service provider for a trial session
* Practise with a family member
* Watch online tutorials about using teleservices
* What can I expect from TelePBS sessions?
* • Talk about what to expect with your chosen service provider
* • Ask for examples of what a session may look like
* Will I need an interpreter?
* • Ask your service provider if someone speaks your preferred language
* • An interpreter may be able to phone in during the support sessions

# Developing Rapport and Engagement

Developing the therapeutic relationship and establishing rapport has been found to be fundamental to a successful TelePBS service. This however can take time via telepractice. It is important to be on the same page in terms of the benefits and limitations of TelePBS. For example, it may take longer to gather data and implement behaviour support, however sessions can be more frequent with less travel.

## How do I develop the relationship and establish rapport online?

Without the natural distractions that come with being there in person, sometimes there is a tendency to jump straight into business when you first get online for a session. Slowing down, pausing, and engaging in some small talk can help setting the scene for a good connection and session ahead.

When engaging directly with the person with a behaviour of concern, and to build rapport and comfort of the person in the online space, interact by:

* doing activities such as drawing on an online white board
* doing show and tell with special interests
* developing a document on screen called “All about me” and encourage the person to take photos to share about their life
* asking the person to “show” you around their environment and introduce you to people, places, and pets

Seeing the face of someone you are talking to, as opposed to talking only, can help support the development of rapport. Where the person and/or their support team prefers to turn the video off, some platforms allow you to replace it with a static image of yourself for them to look at. Alternatively, you can send a picture of yourself to the individual and their family so they can see who they are talking to.

# Next steps

Now that you have the fundamental information about TelePBS and getting TelePBS ready, it is important for you to learn about how to adapt in-person services to the online environment.

The *“How can I align TelePBS with quality practice?”* resource provides information on the delivery of TelePBS, outlining key phases in the PBS process including:

* conducting effective online assessment and planning
* implementation using a coaching approach
* conducting online monitoring and evaluation