

This post is unpublished and will be published Wednesday, September 9, 2020 - 07:33.



MCNewsArticle [6 benefits of online speech therapy](#) has been updated.



6 benefits of online speech therapy

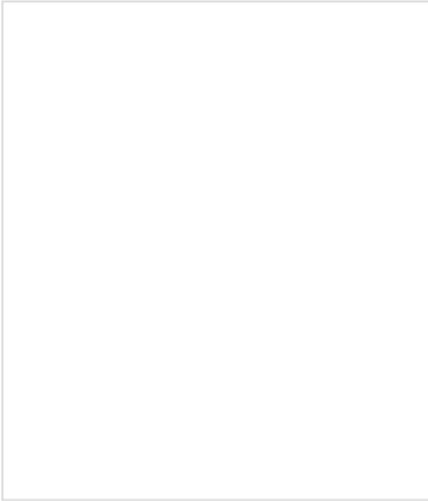
Virtual speech counselling is gaining ground, especially after the recent Circuit Breaker. A speech expert discusses its pros and cons.

BY DR LISA LIM SU LI

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POSTED: 04 AUG 2020 | UPDATED: 04 AUG 2020

4 Views



[Communication skills](#) is one of the most important tools [your child will need in life](#), both personally and professionally.

If your youngster has [trouble with his/her speech](#), it's natural to feel worried. Not to fret, however, you have a convenient way of receiving speech therapy — at home. Yes, that's right, online speech therapy has been taking the world by storm!

Online speech therapy might just be what your child needs to open up a whole new world of possibilities for them. For children with [speech and language delays](#), the main focus is to help them overcome the challenges they face and get them talking and interacting with their peers.

Even though people tend to feel that traditional face-to-face therapy is the obvious choice for helping their child with language issues, the trend is changing. Online speech therapy now offers ways to overcome issues such as accessibility and convenience.

What is online speech therapy?

Traditional speech therapy in a face-to-face setting may not always be feasible or convenient, especially in today's world. Therefore, online speech therapy is a great alternative to help your child overcome their speech and language difficulties.

"Online speech therapy might just be what your child needs to open up a whole new world of possibilities for them."

So what exactly is online speech therapy? And how does it work?

Online speech therapy or teletherapy uses video streaming to provide speech therapy sessions with a personable "feel". The patient and [speech therapist](#) communicate and interact on-screen through a webcam, headset with a microphone or any other tool for communicating. [Therapeutic exercises](#) like speaking, listening, reading and writing are conducted during such sessions.

How does it work?

We live in a fantastic new world where things are increasingly done online. Working remotely and contacting people over apps like Zoom, Google Meet or Facetime has brilliant advantages, although some people might need a little time to get used to it.

Online consultations is just one of the new options an [increasingly tech-centric society](#) has made available. That said, online consultations were offered even before the [COVID-19 pandemic](#). Thanks to technology, I have been able to ensure that my international patients meet their therapy goals in their home country through virtual follow-up sessions.

During the [Circuit Breaker period](#) in April and May 2020, online speech therapy enabled my Singaporean clients to continue receiving care in the safety and comfort of their homes as we were unable to meet face to face.

Using an Internet connection, I conducted these sessions live and communicated with my clients via a webcam and an external microphone, when it was needed. My client and I were able to simultaneously see the materials I used on-screen during the session. I also e-mailed additional materials and practices to them later.

These online therapy sessions are similar to traditional face-to-face consultations. However, you will also need a computer, a strong Internet connection, headphones or a microphone.

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What your role is

You will accompany your child throughout the session to help them navigate potential computer issues as well as assist them. These sessions are also intended to help parents and caregivers feel comfortable using the tips and strategies I am teaching.

Who can benefit from online speech therapy?

Online therapy for speech, language, voice and stuttering is an extremely flexible way for patients to receive the therapy they need.

This treatment option is excellent for patients who have [social anxiety](#) and lack access to therapy. Of course, while some children may take to it effortlessly, others might not like the switch.

Things to consider include whether your child is able to focus on the screen and whether they can use a computer. So, children over age 5 might be more suitable for online therapy as they have reasonable attention and listening skills.

6 benefits of online speech therapy

Not only is online speech therapy exciting and expanding rapidly, it is worth exploring for several reasons. A virtual approach to tackling speech and language difficulties offers the following advantages:

1. No need to travel You can use the time needed for the commute to the therapist to do something else on your busy schedule.

“Online therapy for speech, language, voice and stuttering is an extremely flexible way for patients to receive the therapy they need. This treatment option is excellent for patients who have [social anxiety](#) and lack access to therapy.”

2. Saves cost Online therapy sessions can help you reduce travel costs.

3. Flexible scheduling Working with a speech therapist online offers more flexibility in scheduling sessions. At the same time, you'll be observing the sessions with your child, so you can pick up tips on how to make a better success of your own at-home efforts. Your speech therapist might also allow you to record these online sessions for future viewing.

4. A familiar and comfortable setting Children with speech and language difficulties can access professional speech therapy services in the comfort of their own homes. Since the session takes place in a familiar setting, your youngster should feel more comfortable.

Personally, I have been delighted to support international families who have restricted access to speech therapists in their home countries. Through word of mouth, I also had occasional requests from families who had to relocate and have benefitted from online Hanen parent-training programs like *It Takes Two To Talk* and *More Than Words* to help their children with language delays.



5. Quality interactive sessions Children can benefit greatly from the interactive nature of tele-practice, which is especially good for helping kids who [lack attention skills](#) in a real-world setting.

One memorable case was a bright 5-year-old boy from India with moderate [stuttering](#) who received follow-up consultations online every fortnight. After 10 sessions, his stutters reduced from a Severity Rating of 7 to a Severity Rating of 2 to 3 (with 9 = severe stuttering and 1 = no stuttering).

A mother was also delighted when I was able to help her 12-year-old daughter's diction and voice training online to prepare for her [DSA interviews](#) and [PSLE](#) oral examinations in July.

Do be assured about the quality of these online sessions as only qualified and certified therapists arrange and conduct such sessions. You will also receive all the usual in-office benefits including confidentiality.

6. Continuity of therapy and engaging technology During Circuit Breaker, online teletherapy offered continuity of treatment on a versatile platform to support communication and fluency targets, particularly for families we were already treating.

Many children respond well to teletherapy as [technology can motivate them](#). Each teletherapy session is highly individualised with interactive therapeutic activities, videos as well as shared screen Powerpoint "shows" with sound effects that stimulate and engage.

"Children can benefit greatly from the interactive nature of tele-practice, which is especially good for helping kids who [lack attention skills](#) in a real-world setting."

One of my notable cases was of a 10-year-old boy, Aaron (*Names have been changed to protect their identity) from India who was due to fly to Singapore in April for a speech consultation after getting his visa approved in February 2020. He was non-verbal and communicated through gestures or

Alas, with the [COVID-19](#) announcement and subsequent "lockdown", the family could not travel to Singapore. Undaunted, his mother suggested online speech therapy. I hesitated initially as I considered his inattentiveness, verbal dyspraxia and severe [autism](#).

I hadn't expected his enjoyment of and natural motivation towards technology and [music](#). Over the next 10 half-hour sessions, Aaron developed an expressive repertoire of vowels (such as "ee", "oh") and consonants (like "m") taught using his favourite Super Simple tunes on YouTube like *Old MacDonald Had a Farm* and *If You're Happy and You Know It*. Aaron's [parents](#) are delighted with the progress he continues to make in expressive language.

[After the Circuit Breaker](#) ended, 30 per cent of my patients still prefer consulting me online — my online patient base now even includes Indonesians.

The downsides of online speech therapy

Of course, the cons include problems with technology such as occasional glitches like audio lag, though these can be sorted out.

Technical issues aside, certain conditions like [hyperactivity](#), intellectual and [learning disabilities](#) as well as hearing problems, do make it a little more challenging to communicate online. This is why I discuss the strengths and potential limitations of teletherapy with every patient.

Still, we have been impressed in general by how teletherapy has supported our clients' progress. Should another pandemic occur or if patients relocate, online speech therapy is a great option as they will be able to continue receiving the help they need. Try an online session and the results might amaze you.

That said, although both types of speech therapy are great for different reasons, the form in which your child receives their therapy will depend on him or her ultimately. I hope this article helps you to make an informed decision for your child's future.

Dr Lisa Lim Su Li is the clinical director and senior speech language pathologist at [The Speech Practice](#).

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