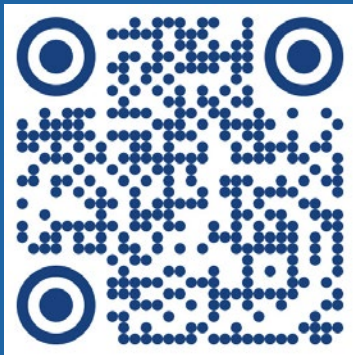


# Conducting Virtual Authentic Assessment with Young Children with Disabilities

*Bright Start International Conference  
London England  
November 2024*



<https://inteca-idea.org/>



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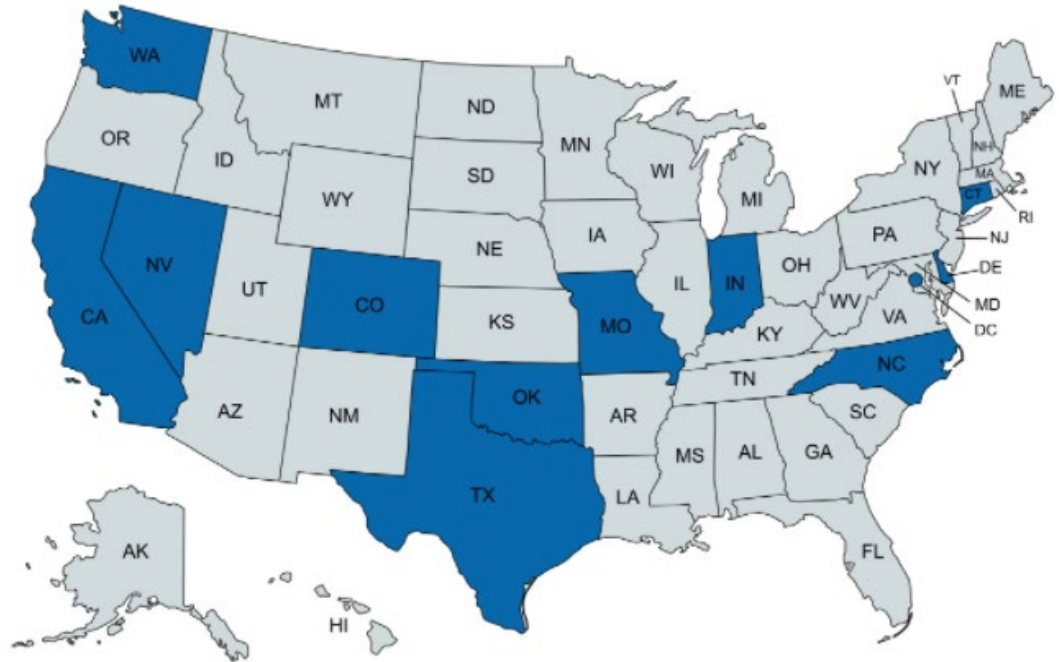
November 23, 2024

# What is virtual assessment?

- Assessment in which one or more **assessors are not in the same physical location as the child**. The assessors **use technology** to observe the child engaged in everyday activities in a familiar setting to gather information about what a child knows or can do. The assessment process may include asking the parent or caregiver to interact with the child in some way (e.g., asking the child to do something, positioning the child in a certain way, etc.) while the assessors observe remotely.
- Hybrid assessments:
  - can involve one or more assessors observing remotely with one or more in the room (simultaneous hybrid)
  - Some part of the assessment conducted virtually and another part at a different time conducted face-to-face (sequential hybrid)

# Interviews and Focus Groups: Participants

- Spoke with 79 individuals:
  - state administrators,
  - local administrators,
  - practitioners, and
  - families
- From 11 states and the District of Columbia
- Included programs for birth to 3 and 3 to 5-year-olds



# Decision to Use Virtual Assessment

## Decision to Use VA

- Many programs started using VA because of the pandemic
- In some places, state decisions. In others, local decision

## Continuing VA After Pandemic

- Mixed – some still use VA, some discontinued it
- Greater continued use in 0-3 than in 3-5 programs
- Often provided to families as an option

# Ongoing Use of Virtual Assessment



- More use in rural areas or where service region is geographically large
- VA mostly used for determining eligibility
- Sometimes paired with virtual service delivery, but not always

# Benefits of Virtual Assessment

## Logistical and staffing benefits

- Easier scheduling/less driving
- Increased access (distance, weather, illness, fewer no shows)
- Staffing flexibility and workaround for staff shortages (reduce wait time)

“It lets us perform more assessments...we can hit a bigger amount of people instead of having to push them off, like we don't have room, we don't have space, we'll see you in a month, we'll see you in two months. Now we can fit them in faster, so they're getting their needs met quicker.”

– Local administrator

# Benefits of Virtual Assessment

## **Prepares families for active engagement in intervention**

- Active parent involvement and capacity building (providers coaching parents)

“A big benefit is [that our state] uses the coaching model. So, when we were doing our evals in person...it was a much more structured assessment and much more standardized...it kind of set us up more as the experts at that initial assessment than it does now with the telehealth because we’re already using the parents and coaching the parents. That’s a benefit that helps them out because it already sets them up as the expert...it sets the tone that that they’re the experts on their child and we’re going to observe and then help them from there.” – Practitioner

# Benefits of Virtual Assessment

- **Increased use of authentic assessment**
  - Programs switched to authentic assessment because direct testing cannot be done through virtual assessment
- **Increased access to specialists**
  - Especially in rural areas

“...in a certain county, we may never have a speech therapist who goes to that county...so every child in that county is getting maybe always PT and OT. Now, we are able to say your concern is speech, your concern is gross motor, let me put you with the most appropriate team. So that is a huge, huge benefit.”

– Local administrator



# Benefits of Virtual Assessment

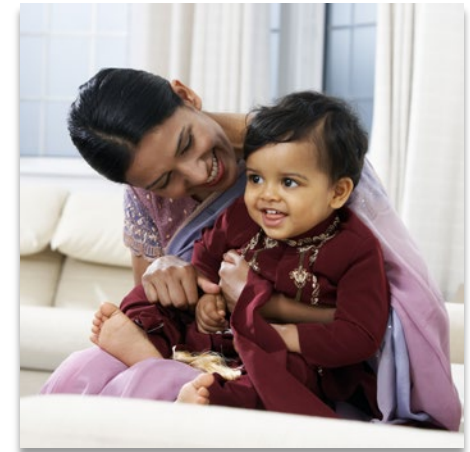
## Allows for more participation in the assessment process

- Greater participation from
  - **Family/people who know the child**
    - Multiple family members in different places can participate
  - **Collaborating providers** – could be in one virtual location or in separate virtual locations



# It's Important to Prepare Families for VA

- Topic areas:
  - About the assessment and general information (both VA and in person)
  - Additional information how VA works, interacting with the child during VA assessment, preparing the environment for VA
  - Using technology
- How programs do this:
  - Tip Sheets
  - Reminder calls with what to expect
  - Practice call with technology checks
  - Informally



# Challenges and Solutions

## Obtaining information about the child

- Limitations in what can see/hear/touch
  - Possible solutions: prepare parent about camera positioning and type of technology to use, reduce background noise/distractions, enhance practitioner skill in coaching parents

## Practitioner and parent attitudes and beliefs

Possible solution: Provide accurate information and guidance

## Limited or varied guidance for VA for practitioners and families

- Possible solution: Provide written guidance and PD rather than informal support.

Honestly, **I didn't feel confident.** ... I like being able to be the one interacting with the student and sort of **being able to assess directly** and not necessarily rely on parent report....  
-Practitioner

# Challenges and Solutions

## Technology

- **Lack of technology** or strong **internet connectivity**
  - Possible solutions: loaner devices or mobile hotspots
- **Limited technology knowledge** or low confidence about using technology (families & practitioners)
  - Possible solution: prepare families and practitioners on how to use the technology, accessible troubleshooting when things go wrong



# VA can provide good quality information about the child

## Equal or better-quality information because:

- Familiar home environment
- With familiar people
- During everyday routines
- No stranger present

## Obtaining information about the child can be challenging

- Limitations in what can see/hear/touch
  - Possible solutions: prepare parent about camera positioning and type of technology to use, reduce background noise/distractions, enhance practitioner skill in coaching parents

# Views Vary About Quality of Information Produced by Virtual Assessment

The quality is **the same** as it is in person. It **depends on the evaluators**, you know. If you're asking the right questions and watching for the right things in the right way. That's what defines the quality. So, you can have a person go in-person and not get quality because of how they ask the questions or don't. So it depends on the provider, the evaluator. – State Administrator

So, I wouldn't say that you see a **different quality in assessments**. If anything, the child is not interacting with you, which gives you **more of an accurate depiction of how they are engaging with their everyday environment**. So how they're engaging with their caregivers, how they're engaging with their home. I think that that can be more helpful than if I am present and the child's distracted by me, or just wants to engage with me.  
-Practitioner

# Views Vary About Quality of Information Produced by Virtual Assessment

“Staff feel that **in-person is better.**”  
Local Administrator

“I feel like the virtual format should kind of **be the last resort.**”  
Practitioner

“Why wouldn't we **utilize the parent or whoever's with that child to help get the information we need about a child.** Getting them to have the child demonstrate a particular skill or quality that we're looking for. **Who better to elicit a good response than a parent or a grandparent,** versus us as strangers coming into these contrived situations? But, it's that belief that the expert has to do something with the child in order for results to be real.”  
State level administrator

“It depends” was a common answer...

# Can Virtual Assessment Produce Valid Results?

- There is limited empirical evidence on this question.
- Nothing in our interviews would suggest that it does not produce valid information.
- One program repeated several eligibility evaluations at parent request as in-person
  - The in-person evaluations produced the same result.





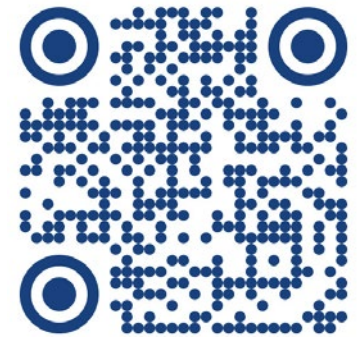
# Thank you!



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