OTpreneur:
How To Establish A Thriving Private Practice

Exercises & Resources

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Resources:

Exercise 1: Clarifying Your Vision

Who Will You Serve?

- Imagine the client sitting in your waiting room. What do they look like? What challenges brought them here? What strengths do they carry with them?

Mission & Values in Action

- When someone walks into your practice for the first time, how do you want them to *feel*—physically, emotionally, and relationally?

Your Community Impact

- Picture your practice five years from now—what role is it playing in your local community?

Clarifying Your “Why”

- What keeps you going when the going gets tough?

Exercise 2: Finding Your Voice

The Feelings Behind Your Brand

Reflect individually, then share in small groups.

- Three words that describe the emotional “tone” of my brand are:

  ____

Group Prompt: Share your three words with your group. Do others hear the same tone when you explain your vision?

Symbols, Images, & Stories

Use imagery to unlock brand ideas.

- A symbol that represents the work I do (e.g., bridge, tree, path):

  ____

- A story from my life or career that captures *why* I do this work:

  ____

- If my brand were a person, it would act/feel like:

  ____

Group Prompt: Tell your story aloud. What do group members notice about the values or themes woven into it?

Exercise 3: Make Your Action Plan

Step 1: Set Your Goals

Use "SMART" format. Get specific! Where do you want to be in 6 months? In 1 year? In 3?

- **Goal 1:**
  (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-Oriented)

- **Goal 2:**
  (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-Oriented

- **Goal 3:**
  (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-Oriented

Step 2: My Top 3 Next Steps

Considering your goals above, list three specific actions you can take in the next 1–3 months to move forward. Break it into small, manageable steps:

1.
2.

3. ______________________________

____

Step 3: Accountability Check

- **When will I complete these steps?**

  ____

- **Who can I share my plan with for accountability?**

  ____

Handout 1: Business Foundations

Entity Types: Considerations, Pros & Cons

Entity Type	Pros	Cons
Sole Proprietorship	Simple, inexpensive, full control, pass-through taxation	No liability protection, personal assets at risk
LLC	Liability protection, flexible taxation, credibility	State filing fees, annual reporting requirements
PLLC	Designed for licensed professionals, liability protection	Only available in some states, still personally liable for malpractice
S-Corp	Pass-through taxation, liability protection, potential payroll tax savings	Stricter IRS requirements, shareholder restrictions

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Registration Information

- Apply for an Employer Identification Number (EIN) at irs.gov (free).
- Register your business with your state's Secretary of State office.
- Check if your profession requires additional state licensing or registration.
- Maintain annual state filings and renewals (varies by entity type).

Compliance: State & Federal Considerations

- Follow HIPAA guidelines for client confidentiality and secure record-keeping.
- Stay current on federal tax obligations (quarterly estimated taxes, self-employment tax).
- Abide by state labor laws if hiring employees or contractors.

- Keep professional licenses active and meet continuing education requirements.
- For more info: State licensing boards, sba.gov, and professional associations.

Liability Considerations

- **Physical Office:** Ensure premises liability coverage (slips/falls, visitors).
- **Home Visits:** Have safety protocols and insurance that covers offsite work.
- **Telehealth:** Confirm HIPAA-compliant platforms and state licensure laws for cross-state practice.
- **Malpractice Insurance:** Essential for all licensed providers.
- **Students/Interns:** Liability increases—verify supervision requirements and insurance coverage.

Handout 2: Service & Revenue

Service Options

- Individual therapy
- Couples or family therapy
- Group therapy or support groups
- Workshops or community trainings
- Corporate wellness or consulting
- Telehealth services
- Supervision or mentoring for students/clinicians
- Online courses or digital products

Payer Sources: Pros & Cons

Payer Source	Pros	Cons
Private Pay	Full rate, faster payment, autonomy, less paperwork	Smaller client pool, accessibility concerns
Insurance Reimbursement	Steady referrals, broader access, affordability	Lower rates, delayed payments, heavy documentation, paneling required
Contract Services	Guaranteed caseload, stable income, reduced admin work	Less independence, rates set by organization, limited branding autonomy

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4 Considerations for Determining Your Fee Rate

1. **Know Your Costs:** Fixed (ex: rent, insurance, software) + variable expenses (ex: marketing).

2. **Research Your Market:** Compare local therapy rates and reimbursement rates
    a. (see tools: SimplePractice, Fair Health Consumer, Census/Income by ZIP, Psychology Today).

3. **Factor in Value & Sustainability:** Reflect your expertise, account for non-billable time, support long-term stability.

4. **Test & Adjust:** Start with a sustainable rate, reassess every 6–12 months, communicate changes clearly.

Referral Streams & Sources

- **Professional Networks:** Physicians, mental health providers, schools, rehab centers, community agencies

- **Community Connections:** Local organizations, nonprofits, churches, wellness programs

- **Digital Presence:** Website SEO, Psychology Today, social media, Google Business listings

- **Word of Mouth:** Client satisfaction, reputation, existing relationships

- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** OTs, PTs, counselors, healthcare teams

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Tax & Budgeting Tips

- Set aside **25–30% of net income** for taxes in a separate savings account.
- Track expenses carefully with budgeting or accounting software (e.g., Monarch, QuickBooks, Wave, Xero).
- Budget for quarterly estimated tax payments to avoid penalties.
- Build an emergency fund (3–6 months of expenses) to handle slow periods.
- Consider consulting with a tax professional for entity-specific strategies.

Handout 3: Marketing

Define Your Ideal Client

- Be specific about who you want to reach (age, needs, challenges, strengths).
- Tailor your messaging and services to address their goals and pain points.
- Example: Instead of “I work with anxiety,” try “I help young adults navigate college stress and transitions.”

Create a Strong Online Presence

- **Professional Website:** Mobile-friendly, clear service descriptions, easy contact options.
  - Platforms: Wix, Squarespace, WordPress)
  - Templates: Canva, Etsy
- **SEO (Search Engine Optimization):** Use local keywords like “trauma therapist in Murfreesboro.”
- **Google Business Profile:** Keep your hours, location, and contact info updated.
- **Directories:** Psychology Today, TherapyDen, GoodTherapy, etc.

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3. Leverage Social Media

- Share content that reflects your expertise (mental health tips, blog posts, quotes, short videos).
- Use platforms where your clients spend time (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn).
- Stay consistent—plan content in advance with tools like Later, Buffer, or Hootsuite.

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4. Build Referral Relationships

- Network with local physicians, schools, and other therapists.
- Offer to give workshops, lunch-and-learns, or in-service trainings.
- Stay connected—send thank-you notes or follow-ups when someone refers a client.

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5. Share Your Story & Brand

- Highlight your "why" in your bio and marketing materials.
- Use approachable language that helps potential clients feel safe and understood.
- Create a tagline that captures your mission (e.g., "Helping families find calm in the chaos").

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6. Offer Value Before the First Session

- Write blogs, record short videos, or create free resources (e.g., coping skills PDF, mindfulness audio).
- This builds trust and helps potential clients feel connected before they ever call.

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7. Track & Adjust

- Ask new clients how they found you—track what marketing efforts are working.
- Review quarterly: which strategies bring in clients, and which aren't worth the time?
- Be willing to adjust—marketing is an ongoing process, not a one-time task.

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8. Mind Your Budget

- Start small—invest in the essentials (website, directory listing, business cards).
- Reinvest profits into ads, SEO, or content creation once your client base grows.
- Always evaluate return on investment (ROI).

Handout 4: Website & SEO

Website Platforms to Consider

You don't need to be a tech expert to create a strong site. Start with easy-to-use platforms, then customize as you grow:

- **Wix / Squarespace** – Beginner-friendly, drag-and-drop design, affordable monthly plans, built-in hosting.
- **Canva** – Simple website builder for single-page "digital business cards," good for quick setups.
- **Etsy Templates** – Purchase ready-made website templates designed for therapists; upload into Wix or Squarespace.
- **WordPress (with templates)** – More customizable and scalable, requires more setup but greater flexibility.

Tips:

- Keep your website clean and uncluttered.
- Use professional photos (or high-quality stock images if needed).
- Make your contact information *easy to find* on every page.

What is SEO (Search Engine Optimization)?

SEO is the process of improving your website so it shows up in Google searches when people look for services like yours.

How it works:

- Search engines scan (or "crawl") your site to understand your content.
- The more relevant your site is to what people are searching, the higher you'll appear in results.

- The more times a keyword (ex: occupational therapy, depression, hand therapy, etc) appears throughout the site, the higher the listing in search results.

- SEO makes it easier for the *right clients* to find you.

SEO Basics for Your Practice Website

- **Keywords:** Use phrases your ideal clients are searching for. Get specific!
  - General terms like “OT near me” are going to be very competitive.
  - Small practice sites are likely to be overshadowed by corporate clinics with money to throw around on web design and advertisement. The more specific you are, the more success you’ll have.

- **Titles & Headers:** Include your specialty and location (e.g., “Occupational Therapy for Kids in Nashville, TN”).

- **Meta Descriptions:** Short, clear summaries of each page (show up under your site name in Google).

- **Fresh Content:** Add occasional blog posts, FAQs, or resources to keep your site active.

- **Mobile-Friendly:** Most searches happen on phones—make sure your site looks good on mobile.

SEO Phrases for Occupational Therapists

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- “Occupational therapist in [your city]”

- “Pediatric occupational therapy near me”

- “Support for kids with sensory challenges [your city]”

- “Trauma-informed occupational therapy [your city]”

- “Help with ADHD / executive functioning [your city]”
- “OT for autism spectrum disorder [your city]”
- “Occupational therapy for anxiety and stress [your city]”
- “Life skills coaching for young adults [your city]”

Tip: Think about the words *your clients* would actually type into Google, not professional jargon.

Handout 5: 1099 vs W2 Employment Status

W2 or 1099?

Hiring in private practice can be done in two main ways:

- **W-2 Employee:** A traditional employee on payroll. Taxes are withheld by the employer, who also provides benefits and oversight.
- **1099 Contractor:** An independent contractor responsible for their own taxes, insurance, and business operations

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Use this sheet to guide your decision.

"Do I want or expect my employee to…"

Question	W-2 Employee	1099 Contractor
…work a set schedule that I assign?	✅ Yes – you control their hours and availability.	❌ No – contractors set their own schedules.
…use my office space, equipment, or software systems?	✅ Yes – employees typically use the employer's tools.	❌ Contractors usually provide their own tools and resources.
…represent my brand and follow specific policies (dress code, documentation style, etc.)?	✅ Yes – employees follow organizational policies.	❌ Contractors have more independence in how they work.
…be trained and supervised by me?	✅ Yes – employees are trained and directed by the employer.	❌ Contractors work independently; you can only set outcomes, not methods.
…receive benefits (PTO, health insurance, retirement contributions)?	✅ Yes – often part of employee compensation.	❌ Contractors are not provided benefits.
…have taxes withheld from their paycheck?	✅ Yes – employer withholds and pays employer portion of taxes.	❌ Contractors pay their own taxes and self-employment tax.

…have long-term job stability with my practice?	✅ Yes – employees are hired for ongoing roles.	❌ Contractors are usually hired for projects or limited arrangements.

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