

Ep 165: 56 Ways to Get Private Practice Clients SLP Happy Hour Podcast Transcript

In private practice, there are so many steps to get started. But once you've done all the basics, and you have your practice set up - where do you find clients? This was one of my biggest questions as I got started in my practice, so in today's episode, I'll share with you my 5 most common referral sources and more about how to get clients.

For context, a bit about my practice. I am a full-time SLP in my own private practice and have been since 2016. For the first several years, I had a part-time telepractice school contract and had my clinic part-time. Eventually, I decided to drop my school contract and go to full-time private practice. I loved building my private practice with a part-time school contract and highly recommend it. It gave me some income I could count on as I built up my own practice.

My practice is in a small town in Oregon. I live in a town with about 20,000 people in it, and the nearest city has 100,000 people and is 20-25 minutes away. Many of my clients come from all over. I decided not to be a mobile practice (go to other's houses) because my area is so rural, I would be driving a lot to see each client. I would say many of my clients come from the city that is 20-25 minutes away.

Because I'm in more of a rural area, I have tried to be private pay only, but could never get enough clients to make it work for a full-time practice. If I was a part-time practice, or if I lived in a city, I think I could be cash pay. I do accept private insurance but not Medicaid. I currently accept 2 insurance plans and am planning on taking a third in the next year or so. This is because right now I typically have 2-5 people on my waiting list. Although that's not a lot number-wise, people usually wait 3-4 months to get on my schedule. Because I see lots of Autistic children, these are kids who may be on my caseload for a while, so I rarely have open spots.

What would I like to see change? Once I accept the third insurance plan (I applied many months ago and it will take 6-8 months to be in-network for this plan, since they are very slow), usually this process will take me 3 months. One reason I'd like to accept a third insurance plan is to have a more robust waiting list so I can choose who my clientele is and specialize a bit more. Right now, nearly all the clients on my waiting list have an Autism diagnosis. I'm also considering taking a part-time telepractice school contract so again I can carry a smaller caseload and specialize more, which I honestly think will reduce my stress and make things easier on me. I'm sharing this because satisfaction can be a moving target, I've never felt like I've "arrived" - as time passes, my needs and desires change. I encourage SLPs considering private practice to consider their business like a ship - you can move the sails to go in another direction as you like.

Because I have an online intake system and I ask new clients where they hear about me, I was able to look through my paperwork and see where I got my clients. I checked for the past six months, and the 5 referral sources I'll share here were 100% of my referrals. So let's share these 5 helpful referral sources.

One - Other Therapists (SLPs, OTs, etc)

There's one SLP in the area who works with older Autistic children, and she gives younger referrals to me. I also work with an OT (we co-treat weekly) and she has also sent me referrals. I try to check in a few times per year with other SLPs in the area, ask if they are full or if they need referrals, and share the state of my waiting list. Right now, everyone else is also full and either not taking referrals or has a pretty long waiting list.

So if you are just starting - you may want to reach out to other providers in the area. If it feels like too much of a leap to call other SLPs, think about related professionals you may want to contact (OTs, PTs). And it's true - you may be in an area where SLPs are competitive and you may not want to reach out to them, that's OK. But it also might be a great exercise to call other SLPs. Find out how long their waiting lists are, and what they like to treat. Even if you don't have a waiting list (yet), someday you likely will. Or, if you are starting your practice specializing, you'll need places to refer families that aren't in your specialty.

Two - Word of mouth, previous sibling's clients

For reference, when I opened my practice, I'd recently moved to this area. I didn't have friends or a lot of community connections. I think that's a big part of why it took me about six months to get mostly full. Now, many of my referrals are younger siblings of students I've worked with in the past, or people who are friends or coworkers with the families of previous clients.

Of course, this referral source takes time. I didn't have many clients coming to me through word of mouth from previous clients in the first few years, but after that I had more of these referrals. If you are also new to an area, this is something you don't have to DO anything about right now - but providing good service means people will share your name over time.

Three - Google Places - yes you need to list an address and get reviews as soon as you can

Listing your business on Google Places is a great way to increase your SEO (search engine optimization) or in other words make yourself more findable on Google. As you get clients, ask them to review you on Google Places. You do need an address for Google Places, so that can be a challenge if your practice is mobile or you work from home. As the years passed and I got more Google Reviews, that also made me easier to find (that SEO again) when people did a google search. When you search for example "speech therapy near me" you'll see on the right side that places that show up on Google Places show up on the top-right (you can do this google search so you can see). You can find out online how to list yourself on Google Places.

Four - Primary care providers ask for referral specialists

Primary care providers often want to know resources so they can make referrals to their patients. At most places, you can ask if they have a referral coordinator or who handles referrals. They will especially be interested if you take insurance (and what insurance plans you

want) and if you are accepting new patients, and they may ask how long your waiting list is. Again, they are looking for places to make referrals to - so letting them know you exist allows them to update their referral information and get more kids seen by SLPs.

Five - your website & blog

I started blogging on my website six months before I opened my clinic, and I recommend doing the same if you can as often as you can. When you add more information to your website, Google finds it and can rank your site better on searches (and if you can get on the first page, that's great). You do that through SEO (search engine optimization) mostly through having keywords (your area, speech therapy, and other words people would search for - those are keywords), and by updating your website (for example, through updating a blog for parents about speech topics), your website will be easier to find.

To be honest, in the first few years of my practice, I spent time doing this. Now that I have all the referrals I need, I don't spend a lot of time on my website.

MIDROLL

If you are interested in starting your own private practice, or growing your practice, I can help.

Deciding if you want to accept insurance?

Overwhelmed by the first steps?

Want to get a space but need to talk it out?

Want suggestions on systems to streamline your business?

Go to www.slphappyhour.com/coach - sign up for a 1:1, and let me support your next steps.

-END Midroll -

And here's a BONUS - if you do accept insurance, many of your referrals will come from the insurance plans you are in-network for. They'll usually list you on their website, so when members look for providers, if they check there, you'll be listed.

So if you are planning on starting a private practice and need to get clients: give it time, make sure you communicate with referral sources, and build your online presence. If I were to start, I would list my business on Google Places - so that's your challenge and your next step. You need to have already of course set up your business, episode 37 of this podcast with Jill Shook will take you through those steps.

Other episodes:

How do you get in network, steps to get started, boundaries I have with clients, systems for business