



What is Occupational Therapy?

Children learn through play experiences, engaging with objects, their environment and people. Occupational Therapists focus on children's ability to play. Play is a “childhood occupation” play is what kids “do”.

Children learn and develop a wide range of skills through play in OT such as using their bodies and hands bilaterally in a coordinated manner, interpreting sensory information, developing fine and gross motor skills, development of an age appropriate attention span and being able to engage in visual/perceptual motor tasks in order to be successful in academics. Delays in development of these skills significantly impact the child's ability to engage in social skills with peers, function in school, have appropriate behaviors at home and engage in the community.



Occupational Therapy intervention is very often a prerequisite to being able to be successful in other related services such as speech and physical therapy. If children are struggling with a short attention span, sensory processing issues, behavioral issues their gains in PT and Speech/Language may be limited.

The Following are some of the Specific Areas that OT needs to improve often before a child can move ahead with other therapies. One or several of these can interfere with a child’s development and be an impediment to progress.

Sensory Processing

Sensory processing provides children with essential information about their bodies and the environment in which they function. OT’s provide children with information about where their body is in space, how the body is maneuvering, what effect the environment is having on their body, what is happening in the environment and how to effectively respond to tasks and environmental demands.

There are two types of Sensory Processing modulation difficulties:

1. One is sensory over-responsiveness (hypersensitivity)
→ leads to children avoiding sensory input because it is too overwhelming.
2. The other is sensory under-responsiveness (hyposensitivity)
→ leads to children seeking out sensory input.

Motor Planning/Body Awareness

Motor planning is the ability to conceive, plan, and carry out a skilled, non-habitual motor act in the correct sequence from beginning to end. Incoming sensory stimuli must be correctly integrated in order to form the basis for appropriate, coordinated motor responses. The ability to



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motor plan is a learned ability which is generalized to all unfamiliar tasks so a child does not need to consciously figure out each new task he or she faces.

If you close your eyes right now, you know what direction your feet are pointing (and you don't need to look). The reason you know where your body is in space is because of a sense called **proprioception**. A child will appear clumsy, unsafe or avoid activities with other children and may demonstrate a lack of enjoyment in typical play when their proprioception is impaired.

Behavior Impact due to Impaired Sensory Processing:

Children with impaired sensory processing will demonstrate a variety of behavior; frustration, impulsivity, frequent tantrums, avoidance, inflexibility, easily upset, excessive crying, limited attention and poor social skills. Addressing the underlying sensory needs is crucial to addressing the maladapted behaviors.

Fine Motor/Grasp Skills: involve the small muscles of the body that enable such functions as writing, grasping small objects, and fastening clothing. They also involve strength, fine motor control, and dexterity.

Visual-Motor Skills: or hand-eye-coordination refers to the ability to coordinate vision with the movements of the body (i.e. cutting on a line, coloring within the lines, catching a ball, tracing, scribbling, building block & more!)

Visual-Perceptual Skills: enable children to visually discriminate among graphic forms and to judge their correctness. This involves the ability to accurately interpret what is seen. There are a number of specific skills that fall into this category including visual discrimination, form constancy, figure ground, and visual closure. (i.e. completing puzzles, scanning, hidden pictures, matching/sorting & more!)

Crossing Midline: is vital to the development of using both sides of the body together, such as putting on shoes and socks, writing and cutting. It promotes the coordination and communication of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Before midline crossing is well established, children are usually observed to engage in tasks on only one side of their body (i.e. reaching for an item placed on their left side with only their left hand).

Bilateral Coordination: Bilateral coordination refers to the ability to coordinate both sides of the body at the same time in a controlled and organized manner; for example, stabilizing paper with one hand while writing/ cutting with the other.

Postural Stability: the ability to control the body position in space for the purpose of movement and balance. It is necessary for maintaining a static position and for assisting body coordination in dynamic position changes