



OT IN THE SCHOOLS

BY ANA AMON, OTR/L

WHAT DOES OT HELP STUDENTS WITH?

- Visual-Motor Skills
- Fine Motor Skills
- Following Directions & Task Sequencing
- Sensory Integration - improving focus, attention to task, and learning strategies for self-regulation
- Compensatory strategies for deficits that are unlikely to change

VISUAL MOTOR SKILLS

- Near-point copying: e.g. from textbooks, worksheets, etc.
- Far-point copying: from the whiteboard or smart board
- Eye-hand coordination
- Figure-ground discrimination – finding objects in a crowded field
- Visual closure - Understanding how to complete an image when only part of it is shown
- Attention to the big picture and attention to detail (critical for math proficiency)
- Spatial planning – fitting writing on a line or math on a page (showing their work in an organized manner).

FINE MOTOR SKILLS

- Handwriting
- Manual dexterity - used to create, build and explore objects, as well as self care.
- Use of academic tools – rulers, scissors, calculator, tape, etc.
- Coordination of left and right hands – for example, stabilizing paper when writing or cutting paper.
- Pencil grasp for function and efficiency
- Keyboarding on computer

FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS & TASK SEQUENCING

- Following multi-modal cues (visual, auditory, tactile)
- Following written directions
- Following an example or visual model
- Creating or following the steps in a process
- Motor planning
- Problem solving - building executive function skills

SENSORY INTEGRATION

Sensory processing differences may present as attention deficit or behavioral problems, or may simply contribute to those issues

Students with sensory dysregulation may be:

- Sensory Seeking - e.g. the student who is overly distracted by peers, mouths their shirt or pencil, fidgets, touches everything.
- Sensory Avoiding – e.g. hides under their hoodie or behind their hair, cannot concentrate in a noisy room, closes their eyes a lot, wears headphones, daydreams.

HOW DO STUDENTS GET OT?

- Students are referred by teachers , staff or parents – *remember, there must be academic impact.*
- The parents must agree to OT testing by signing their permission
- OT assessments are given that look at how sensory processing, fine motor and visual motor *skills compare to their peers.*
- An IEP is held with parent/guardian. The OT makes a recommendation based on the testing. The parent and special ed team decide if the student is likely to benefit from receiving pull-out <of class> OT services.
- OT is usually provided from 30 to 60 minutes per week.
- OT goals are written in the IEP by the OT to address areas of concern.

WHY DOES OT IN THE SCHOOLS SOMETIMES LOOK LIKE PLAY OR ARTS & CRAFTS?

- Children learn through play but in OT the activities are chosen to build specific skills
- Fine motor coordination starts at the core and works its way out to the extremities – so sometimes we work on building core strength or facilitating left/right brain communication by crossing the midline
- Sequencing and fine motor skills are sometimes worked on via games or crafts
- Eye-hand (visual-motor) coordination is sometimes addressed through games
- Sensory-based activities may include art materials

CAN OT HELP TEACHERS & STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM?

Yes – OTs can collaborate with teachers to help with strategies and tools to increase student attention and success in the classroom

- Seating options
- Fidgets and other sensory-based tools and ideas
- Timers, reading aids, pencil grips
- Student-specific strategies