

When to refer to an Occupational Therapist

Referral is appropriate when a child is demonstrating any of the following:

1. Delayed fine motor skills

Some children experience delay or difficulties with:

- Colouring, tracing, copying, drawing
- Cutting and pasting
- Handwriting and letter formation
- Developing hand dominance
- Developing age appropriate grasps including a pencil grasp.

There can be a number of factors contributing to such difficulties including:

- Decreased hand strength
- Delayed in hand manipulation skills
- Delayed bilateral skills (using both hands together co-ordinately)
- Difficulties with motor planning
- Delayed visual motor skills
- Difficulties with attention self regulation.

An Occupational Therapist can work with your child to teach and develop these skills and also teach parents strategies and activities to practise at home to improve these skills.

2. Delayed gross motor skills

Some children experience delays or difficulties with:

- Running and skipping
- Jumping and hopping
- Balancing
- Catching, throwing and kicking balls
- Climbing
- Riding bikes

There can be a number of factors contributing to such difficulties including:

- Decreased strength
- Decreased bilateral and unilateral coordination
- Decreased coordination
- Delayed motor processing
- Delayed visual motor skills

An Occupational Therapist can work with your child to teach and develop these skills and also teach parents strategies and provide exercise programs to practise at home to improve these skills.

3. Delayed play and social skills:

If your child is experiencing difficulties with giving eye contact, taking turns and sharing, initiating conversations, or engaging and interacting with peers then you should consider contacting an Occupational Therapist. They may recommend individual therapy or perhaps a group to address such difficulties.

Age appropriate play stages include:

18 months: Briefly imitates simple everyday activities eg: feeding dolls

2 years: Follows adult around and imitates domestic activities, plays imaginative games eg: bus driver, mother feeding etc, defends own possessions with determination and will not share, plays near children but not with them

2 ½ years: Plays for longer and involve adults in play, watches other children play and may join in for a few minutes, does not share

3 years: Likes to help eg: with gardening, shopping etc, plays make believe with invented objects or people with other children, enjoys playing with blocks, boxes, trains, dolls both alone and with others, understands sharing toys and shows affection for younger children

4 years: Can be cheeky with adults and quarrelsome with playmates when he/she does not get own way, shows sense of humour in play, loves to dress up and play make believe, plays complicated games with objects and enjoys building things eg: cubby houses, needs company with other children, understands taking turns and sharing, shows sympathy for younger children when they are in distress

4. Delayed cognitive skills:

Some children experience delays or difficulties with cognitive skills. This can affect their ability to participate in many daily activities including play, self-care, puzzles, mazes, sorting activities, handwriting etc. An Occupational Therapist can teach your child strategies to improve their planning skills and also teach parents strategies to make planning and cognitive tasks easier for your child.

5. Difficulties with self-care

An Occupational Therapist can assist with teaching your child the skills required for self care skills such as dressing, toileting, grooming and eating. There are number of factors that can contribute to difficulties with self care skills including:

- Delayed fine motor skills
- Difficulties with bilateral coordination
- Difficulties with gross motor coordination
- Difficulties with motor planning
- Difficulties with sensory processing
- Difficulties with concentrating
- Behavioural issues

6. Sensory processing difficulties

Some children experience difficulties perceiving and processing sensory information from their environment. Children may seek or avoid certain senses such noises, touch, smells, tastes, movements and visual stimuli. An Occupational Therapist can create a sensory diet for your child which will involve giving your child the appropriate amount of sensory input they need so that they can feel calm and attend to their environment. Children with sensory processing difficulties often have difficulties self regulating their behaviours and concentrating.

An Occupational Therapist can also provide intervention and strategies to assist with auditory or visual processing difficulties