



OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Pediatric Occupational Therapist?

Occupational therapists work with people of all ages to help them participate in daily life activities or "occupations." A pediatric occupational therapist focuses on children and their ability to participate in their environments. An occupational therapist works with the child as a whole individual and understands how his/her social-emotional, physical, cognitive, communication and adaptive behavior difficulties make it difficult for them to participate fully in their everyday-life activities. Some skill areas that pediatric occupational therapists work with include play, fine motor, handwriting, self-help, sensory processing, and visual-motor skills.

What are fine motor skills?

Fine motor skills are related to the child's ability to perform tasks with his/her hands. These skills include writing, self-help skills such as manipulating fasteners on clothing, opening containers, using writing and other school-related tools such as scissors, using utensils to eat, tying shoes, etc. Occupational therapists are able to assess a child to determine what skill area is being affected and take action to improve the child's ability to perform. An occupational therapist works from the bottom up; he/she looks at the environment, sensory processing, muscle functioning, positioning, coordination, and other areas when determining the cause of decreased skill. Once the cause is identified, the therapist works on these underlying areas of need so that they improve the foundational skills, not just a "splinter" skill or a skill that is beneficial at this time and may not be beneficial in the future.

What is sensory integration therapy?

Sensory integration therapy is used for children who have difficulty with processing sensory information. The sensory information that the body must organize and perceive correctly includes vision, auditory, touch, olfaction (smell), taste, vestibular (movement) and proprioceptive (positional). Often times, children who have autism, vestibular processing disorders, dyspraxia (difficulty with fluid and coordinated body movements), sensory discrimination and perception problems, sensory defensiveness, gravitational insecurity, sensory registration problems, and others benefit from Sensory Integration Therapy.

Sensory Integration Therapy assists the child in participating in his/her daily life activities by introducing them to sensory activities in a systematic way to help him/her cope and deal with his/her information that he/she receive.

How do I know if my child has a sensory integration disorder?

Efficient organization of sensory information provides the foundation for the development of basic functional skills. If there is a problem with the processing of sensory information, there can be many potential outcomes that might cause a parent concern.

A disruption in sensory processing can result in sensory defensiveness (sensory seeking or sensory avoiding behaviors), problems in self-regulation (activity levels too high or too low, not matched for the task at hand), and difficulties with praxis (the ability to conceive, organize and execute skills of all kinds). Disruptions in processing sensory information can interfere with self-care skills, language skills, motor skills, academic skills,

and social/emotional skills.

Some specific concerns might be:

- Takes a long time to learn a new task/skill
- Seems clumsy, has too many accidents
- Not keeping up with peers
- Presents as a behavioral problem at school
- Has trouble with handwriting
- Demonstrates unpredictable behavior in social situations, especially new or highly stimulating ones
- Displays short attention span/fidgety
- Seems overly-dependent on routine or schedules and/or easily upset with minor changes
- Acts impulsively or explosively
- Angers easily or frequently accused of fighting, acting out or "bullying" others
- Appears overly colicky or fussy
- Exhibits "picky" eating behavior

My toddler does not like when his hands are messy. Is this a problem?

It is common for a young child to respond negatively to various textures in his/her environment. It becomes a concern when these responses begin to interfere with activities that must be performed on a day-to-day basis or if the reaction to these events occurs very often during the day or last for a long time. Sensory events that a child with tactile (touch) sensory defensiveness would react to include hair washing/combing, touching food or messy materials with their hands/feet, clothing on their body, clipping nails, wearing a hat, wearing shoes/sandals, etc. If these events make a child cry or display other negative reactions often or for a long period of time, this may indicate that your child has difficulty with his or her sensory system.

Does my child really need sensory integrative therapy? Can't they just practice?

We are sure that the family and teaching staff have tried to "teach" the child skills that appear difficult. Unfortunately, unless the child has the underlying ability to "be taught" the skill, it will not be mastered. It is important to remember that not all types of learning, particularly motor learning, can be mastered by practicing. No matter how many times children practice a wrong pattern, it won't make it right. Until they have the internal ability to do it correctly, they will be unable to correct the problem.

Does In Harmony Pediatric Therapy work with children sensory integration/processing and fine motor difficulties?

Yes. We have evaluation tools, therapy tools and materials, and experience with sensory integration, global developmental delays and fine motor delays, and help children overcome obstacles in a fun, positive way.