



The Beginners Guide to

PEDIATRIC OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY



Children in Motion

Pediatric Occupational Therapy



Hey there, I'm Michaelene.

Over the past 30 years I have been helping parents, just like you, get their children the support they need to find success in their everyday lives.

As someone who is fully immersed in the OT world, sometimes I forget to consider what it might feel like to be new to the therapy scene. Which is exactly why I created this resource.

Starting something new can be nerve wracking - but it doesn't have to stay that way. Let's get you off on the right foot & set you up for success on your OT journey!

Pediatric Occupational Therapy 101

What do occupational therapists do?

At the most basic level, occupational therapists help people of all ages develop the skills they need to thrive in their everyday lives. These skills could be related to dressing & personal hygiene, household chores like emptying the dishwasher or putting clothes away, making a snack or meal, participating in group activities, and more.

Where do they work?

Most people are familiar with occupational therapy in a hospital or rehab setting, but OTs can also work in schools, in clients homes, and in their own clinics.



What education do they have?

To become an occupational therapist, students must have a bachelor's degree and then complete either a masters or doctoral level occupational therapy program at an accredited school. Graduates are required to complete a set amount of clinical observation hours at partnering therapy clinics. During their clinical observations students have the opportunity to experience different therapy settings & specialties.

How can occupational therapy help your child?

Occupational therapy can be beneficial for children in many ways, yes - even though children don't technically have 'an occupation'.

Pediatric occupational therapists have the privilege of leveraging the power of play to help children build

the skills they need to thrive in their everyday lives.

These skills could be related to getting a good night's sleep, eating enough nourishing food, regulating their mind body systems (self regulation), communicating their needs, understanding their emotions, building meaningful relationships, learning & thriving at school, & having a degree of independence.

An occupational therapist can help your child develop skills so they can..

- Focus on their tasks in school
- Work independently
- Not give up when challenged
- Complete homework without having a meltdown
- Listen to & follow directions
- Navigate transitions with ease
- Be flexible
- Tie their shoes & dress themselves
- Pack their backpack
- Cut paper, food, play dough, etc.
- Write legibly
- Stay in control of their bodies
- Communicate their needs & boundaries
- Be a good friend
- Participate in group settings
- Decrease physical confrontations
- Ride a bike
- + more

How do you know whether your child needs OT?

It's always important to preface the answer to this question by reminding ourselves that we aren't robots - we all have days when we aren't our best, and sometimes we will have a few days where we aren't feeling like our best selves.

The important thing to look for is patterns in your child's behavior, and in particular when these patterns interfere with their ability to thrive on a regular basis.



Does your child's lack of coordination or balance make participating in sports extra challenging?

Are their tendencies to get distracted inhibiting their learning at school?

Do their consistent outburst impair their ability to make friends?

Is their lack of finger control negatively impacting their handwriting legibility?

Some other red flags you want to keep an eye out for include..

- 🚩 When your child is emotionally fragile & needs a lot of protection
- 🚩 When your child isn't able to keep up developmentally
- 🚩 When your child has trouble being flexible



So you are ready to start working with an OT - now what?

1. Identify your main goals

Once you are ready to start working with an occupational therapist, one of the first things you should do is identify your main goal(s) you would like to work on with your OT.

Is it increasing handwriting legibility, decreasing meltdowns associated with transitions, improving balance to work towards riding a bike, strengthening grasp/grip, increasing attention span to sit down to eat a meal, minimizing overwhelm in overstimulating environments?

Clearly identifying your goals will help you communicate what you are looking for when you start reaching out to therapists.

2. Create a list of potential OT's

Start by investigating what therapists are in network with your insurance provider. Ongoing therapy visits can add up quickly, so going to someone in your network will lessen the financial burden on your family.

You could also ask your pediatrician's office for a provider's referral list, or reach out for recommendations in parenting groups on Facebook.

3. Call to see who is available

Once you have identified your options, whether that be dependent on who is in network with insurance or what is in your area, start reaching out to each office to see what their availability is.

Some offices might have wait lists, where others may have open availability. It also depends on how urgent you need OT services. Do you have the flexibility to wait? Or do you need services as soon as possible? Keep this in mind as you make your calls.

On the following page we created a worksheet for you to use to help keep track of all of these details - who you've called, what their availability is, whether they take your insurance, etc.

Maybe you can keep track of everything in your head, but if you are like us & have a million things going on at one time it might be helpful to write things down.

OT Communication Tracker

Use this worksheet to organize your search for an occupational therapist to support your child.

1. What are your main goals you would like to work towards?

THERAPY PRACTICE	PHONE NUMBER	IN NETWORK?	ACCEP. NEW CLIENTS?	NOTES

Preparing for your first visit

As with any appointment, give yourself plenty of time to travel to the clinic. If you have not filled out forms before your scheduled visit, come early so you have time to fill out the forms before your visit. When your therapist is ready to see your child, they will come and greet you to take your child to the gym.



Depending on the therapist, they may extend an invitation to you to join in on the session. Typically parents are not invited back during evaluations, however we personally love it when parents are able to join us during treatment sessions - but it all depends on the therapist.

If you want to be part of the session, it doesn't hurt to ask your therapist! We like involving parents because parent education is really important to us, and because it provides another opportunity for parents to give feedback & talk through scenarios with us that we can address together during the session.

What does a typical occupational therapy session look like?

Each therapist has their own established process, so we can't speak for everyone. We can however give you a glance into our therapy sessions so that you can have at least some idea of what to expect.

So for us - all of our treatment sessions are uniquely built for each child with their specific goals in mind. Our sessions are packed with occupational therapy interventions

that incorporate movement, muscle work, and sensory experiences (that create just the right amount of challenge) to maximize time spent with our therapists.

We always like to start our sessions with some muscle work. This could look like jumping into the ball pit or completing an obstacle course. Then from there we focus on your child's specific goals, like building hand muscles to increase legibility, etc. We usually finish the session with more muscle work to ensure your child is in a good place when they leave the clinic.

All of our sessions are child driven.

This means that we follow our client's lead during treatment sessions. Our treatment plans are flexible enough to allow our clients to follow their interests & let them explore their curiosities while we discreetly make adjustments to the activities they show interest in to ensure we work towards their goals.

A heads up about insurance -

Each insurance plan will have its own individual allowances & limitations when it comes to occupational therapy coverage. Depending on your therapist, they may be willing to file with insurance for you, however ultimately it is your responsibility to understand what is covered by your plan.

Some plans require prior authorization to receive benefits, while others limit coverage to a set amount of visits. Make sure to research your coverage before your first visit to avoid having to pay for services out of pocket.



In the past some of our clients have been able to receive in network coverage for services from out of network providers because there were not any in network options within a reasonable distance from their location, or because there was not an in network provider that had the training or experience to render the kind of services they needed. It is rare that insurance companies will do this, but if you are in this position it doesn't hurt to try.

Are you interested in working with an occupational therapist?



If you are located in the Atlanta area we would love to connect.
Get the conversations started by reaching out to us on our
website at <https://childreninmotion.com/contact>

If you are not in the area but have more questions about
pediatric occupational therapy, we are more than willing to talk
with you. The best place for you to ask your questions is
thorough our contact page on our website (listed above).