

the complete beginners guide to

Occupational Therapy

for kids!



Signs Your Child
Needs OT Support

How to Prep for
Your First Visit

What to Expect
Financially



Hi!

I'm Michaelene

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

As someone who is fully immersed in the OT world, sometime I forget to consider what it

You aren't the only one wondering 'what exactly is occupational therapy?'

might feel like to be new to the therapy scene - which is exactly why I created this resource.

Starting something new can be nerve wrecking - but it doesn't have to stay that way. And if it's any comfort at all, you aren't the only one wondering 'what is occupational therapy exactly?' (we get this question a LOT).

Let's dive on in, so you can confidently get the child the support they need to thrive!

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Michaelene Kearney
Owner of Children In Motion



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 OTs 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 bachelors 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 observational hours at partnering therapy facilities. During their clinical observations students have the opportunity to experience different therapy settings & specialties.

Your child might also work with a certified occupational therapy assistant (COTA). COTAs are able to carry out occupational treatment sessions under the direction of an OT.

These practitioners must also obtain specific schooling in the form of an Associates Degree from an accredited OTA program.

How can OT help your child?

Pediatric occupational therapy practitioners 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 nights 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 developmentally appropriate degree of independence.

An occupational therapy practitioner can help your child develop the skills they need to -

Focus on their tasks in school

Work independently

Not give up when challenged

Complete homework without having a meltdown

Listen & follow directions

Navigate transitions with ease

Be flexible

Tie their shoes & dress themselves

Pack their backpack

Cut paper, food, play dough

Write legibly

Stay in control of their bodies

Communicate their needs & boundaries

Be a good friend

Participate in group settings

Decrease toileting accidents

Ride a bike

& more



Signs your child needs help from an 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 & how often these patterns interfere with your child's ability to thrive on a regular basis.

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

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

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

Do their frequent meltdowns frequently interfere with family time or activities?

Some other red flags 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



Tips for finding an OT

#1. Identify your main goals

Once you are ready to start working with an occupational therapy team, one of the first things you should do is identify your main goals 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. Use your insurance provider directory (to start)

Start by investigating what therapists/clinics 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. Determine your timeline

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 services. Do you have the flexibility to wait? Or do you need service as soon as possible?

Preparing for your first visit

Unless your child has had an evaluation done within the past 6 months, your therapist will want to do an evaluation first. This will identify your child's baseline & is needed to create a plan for their therapy treatment.

For the evaluation, therapists will want as little interference from you (the parent!) as possible. For us, we allow parents to observe the evaluation but we ask them to remain quite. This helps us get the most accurate information for the evaluation. Each therapist will have their own policies & procedures, so check with your therapist first!

Once your child has completed the evaluation, they will move on to regular therapy sessions.

What does a typical occupational therapy session look like?

Each therapist has their own established process, so we can't speak for everyone, but we can 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 play based & packed with therapy interventions that

incorporate movement, muscle work, and sensory input that create just the right amount of challenge.

We always like to start our session with muscle work to regulate the nervous system. This could look like jumping into the ball pit or completing an obstacle course. Then from there we focus on therapeutic activities that support your child's specific goals. We usually finish the session with more muscle work to ensure your child is nice & regulated before they leave the clinic.

If you want to be part of your child's therapy session, it doesn't hurt to ask your therapist if you can join in! We like involving parents in our session when possible because parent education is really important to us, and it also provides an opportunity for parents to give feedback & talk through specific scenarios together.



Here's (generally) what to expect financially

So, there are a lot of variables that contribute to the overall expense of occupational therapy. OT is a long term commitment time wise (six months, sometimes years of weekly sessions are needed).

Committing to OT may seem like a huge sacrifice in the present moment, but the skills your child will gain through OT will support their success for the rest of their lives. Investing the time & resources to get them the support they need now will pay dividends in the long run.

Knowing the time commitment that OT requires, to ease the financial burden we recommend that you try to find someone who is in network with

your insurance provider. Your specific plan will determine the amount you have to pay for each visit & how many visits are allowed. Give your insurance provider a call to determine what your copay, co-insurance, or deductible is for OT visits. Additionally ask them how many visits you are allowed on your plan & how to request for more visits if needed.

Currently we are in network with Anthem/Blue Cross Blue Shield. On average our families who are in network with Anthem pay between \$0 - \$130 per visit.*

If you cannot find an OT that is in network with your insurance provider (and within a reasonable distance from your location) you may be able to get 'gap insurance coverage' at a facility/clinic that is out of network.

You may also be able to get some reimbursement from your insurance provider by submitting super bills for your OT services.

It's also worth noting that some clinic may offer to submit your out of network claims to insurance on your behalf, but not all clinics offer this. At the end of the day, you are responsible for understanding your insurance coverage & to be prepared to pay for your OT services.

Our rates for clients who are paying out of pocket are \$400 for an OT evaluation and \$160 for each therapy visit.*

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How to get the most out of occupational therapy

#1 Consistently show up to your appointments

Consistency is super important for OT to have an impact. When you think about it, your child is building new neural pathways in their brain & building muscles. Repetition is required for the progress made in therapy to really stick.

#2 Communicate regularly with your therapist

Think of your therapist as being a resource! Don't be afraid to ask them how to handle (fill in the blank) or tell them about new challenges that your child is experiencing.

They want to help your child, and the more they know the better!

#3. Keep your OT in the loop

This goes along the same line at the previous section, but keep your OT in the loop! Are you considering getting your child evaluated for another professional service (speech, play therapy, ABA)? Let them know! Is your child having a hard time at school, introduce your OT to your child's teacher so they can collaborate!

#4 Do your homework

Ask your therapist what you can work on at home in between sessions to continue to make progress towards your child's goals. As much as we love seeing your child, we don't want to see them forever. We want your child to be able to take the skills we work on in our sessions, and incorporate them into their everyday lives.

Looking for support from an OT?

Here's how we can help -



Work with us in person at our clinic in Sandy Springs, Georgia

If you are in the North Atlanta area we would love to connect with you to chat about how we can support your child & your family.



Check out our free resources & educational blog

If you are unable to come see us in person we have created a bunch of resources that might be helpful to you on our blog & website.