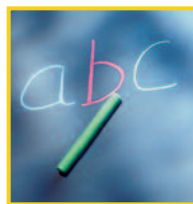


Occupational Therapy in Preschool Settings



Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants

are part of the preschool team.



Occupational therapy is concerned with the child's ability to participate in desired daily life activities or "occupations." In Head Start and other preschool settings, occupational therapists use their unique expertise to help children prepare for and perform important learning and developmental activities. In these settings, occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants support the achievement of developmental and learning outcomes for children with and without disabilities, by facilitating social skills development, motor development, emergent literacy, and the development of adaptive and self-care skills. Occupational therapists are particularly skilled in helping children access curricular activities by contributing to the design and planning of activities, including identifying any needed accommodations or modifications. Additionally, they play a key role in training parents, caregivers, and preschool staff members about the development of children with diverse learning needs.



Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants

bring specific knowledge and expertise to the team to appropriately address children's needs.

Skills for the Job of Living— Helping *All* Children Learn

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants know how to

- provide strategies to facilitate the full participation of all children in daily routines;
- reduce environmental barriers that limit a child's participation in learning activities;
- collaborate with program staff to determine methods for appropriate assessment;
- help plan developmentally appropriate instructional activities; and
- help plan and prepare preschoolers for the transition to kindergarten.



Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants

work with a variety of individuals to address children's needs.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants work with

- children to improve their performance in a variety of learning environments (e.g., playgrounds, classrooms, lunchrooms, bathrooms);
- parents to help them support their child's development and learning;
- teachers to plan and develop activities and environments that include all children;
- support staff to facilitate child success and promote safety within the school environment (e.g., physical and behavioral assistance needs); and
- administrators to provide training for staff and parents, as well as to recommend needed equipment and assist with modifying existing buildings and curriculum to allow access for all.



Occupational therapy services are available for children with special needs if necessary.

Occupational therapy is available for children with special needs, including those who are eligible for early intervention and special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA.) A team process is used to determine the need for occupational therapy services. Children may also be eligible for services under other federal laws, such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Occupational therapists complete assessments and work with other members of the team to help determine what children need to learn. They collaborate with teachers and parents to identify the child's goals and determine the services, supports, and modifications or accommodations needed to achieve those goals. When the team decides therapy is needed for the child to meet his or her goals, then occupational therapy should be included in the child's programming. ■

Developed for AOTA by Leslie Jackson, MEd, OT



**The American
Occupational Therapy Association**

4720 Montgomery Lane
Bethesda, MD 20814-3425
301-652-AOTA (2682)
www.aota.org

Occupational Therapy: Skills for the Job of Living

Copyright 2006 American Occupational Therapy Association. All rights reserved. This material may be printed and distributed without prior written consent.