

# “OT Month”: Celebrating and Promoting Occupational Therapy

By Aimee Schneiderman

October is occupational therapy (“OT”) month, which provides Canadian occupational therapists with the opportunity to promote and increase awareness of the profession.

## So, What is “OT”?

OT is a health profession whose goal is to help people develop the necessary skills to participate in the activities of everyday life. Occupational therapists (“OTs”) help people identify the issues that are interfering with doing daily tasks. Through goal-based strategies, OTs develop and implement programs to enable people to overcome these barriers.

## But Children Don’t Have “Occupations”... So Why Do They Need OT?

Some people may think that OT is only for adults; children, after all, do not have occupations. But a child’s main “job” or “occupation” involves playing, learning and carrying out everyday activities including getting dressed, using scissors, writing and recreational physical activities. OT for children includes intervention aimed at developing the underlying sensory and motor foundations necessary for skill development in addition to the development of strategies that enable children to learn. OT can benefit many children including premature infants, kids with ADHD and typically developing children who are struggling with various school activities.

For children in schools, OT works to ensure that a student can participate in the full breadth of school activities—from cutting with scissors, holding a pencil, writing, participating in gym, paying attention in class or transitioning between activities.

## What Does an OT Do?

OT for your child is likely to involve some or all of the following stages:

- **A referral:** A teacher, a parent, or health care professional may suggest that your child could benefit from OT.
- **Initial assessment:** An OT begins with an initial assessment. The OT starts by establishing a picture of the child’s physical, emotional, cognitive and social development by interviewing parents and teachers and observing the child’s skills using a number of assessment tools.
- **A plan:** The team (the OT, the family and others involved in the child’s care) establishes goals and develops an action plan.
- **Intervention:** An OT may work with the child in a variety of ways: (1) individually; (2) consult with a teacher and family; and/or (3) provide education to the school team and family.
- **Continuous Assessment:** Ongoing assessment and revision help the occupational therapist to track progress.
- **Continuous Communication:** Ongoing communication with the family and the school team assist with goal achievement and allow the team to modify the action plan as needed.
- **Measurement of Outcomes:** At the end of a period of OT, a re-assessment is completed to measure improvement in skills and goal attainment.

Many of the techniques used by OTs involve playful activities, including games, puzzles, arts and crafts, as well as specialized equipment, tools and toys, all of which make OT sessions FUN for children.

### **When and Why Should I Contact an OT?**

**The earlier the better.** Research has shown that child development is most rapid in the pre/grade school years and therefore intervention should begin as early as possible to maximize the outcomes for the child and provide support to the family. If you are concerned that your child has difficulty with tasks expected of their age group, avoids activities that interest most of their peers, or may not be meeting developmental milestones, you may benefit from consulting an OT. And remember, THE EARLIER THE BETTER.

### **How Do I Access OT Services?**

Your local Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) and the Ministry of Health offer publicly funded assessment and therapy services to *any* school age child to enable a student to be successful in their learning environment. A referral can be made by a parent, teacher or health care professional by calling your local CCAC or filling out a form at your school office. Hospitals may also provide publicly funded services; however, wait times are usually long. Private OT is also available for all ages and abilities, typically with minimal wait times. You can find a registered OT through the OSOT and COTO website or by word of mouth.

For more information about OT, check out [www.osot.on.ca](http://www.osot.on.ca), [www.otworks.ca](http://www.otworks.ca), [www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org), [www.coto.org](http://www.coto.org).

### **About the Author**

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