

UNDERSTANDING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Occupational therapy is for people of all ages who need specialized assistance to lead independent, productive and satisfying lives due to physical, neurological, developmental, social or emotional challenges. Occupational therapy helps people develop skills through “occupations” of everyday life including self-care, work/school and play/leisure activities to enhance development, increase self-concept, self-confidence and independence.

Pediatric occupational therapy helps children develop sensory awareness and motor skills necessary for overall development, learning, socialization, and healthy behavior. The occupational therapist works directly with the child, parents, caregivers and teachers to educate and reinforce skills and behaviors to improve and facilitate the child’s performance and independence. At **the Learning Fountain**, our occupational therapists address the following areas:

- **Body Awareness** - The internal understanding of where the body is in space. Body awareness is highly influenced by proprioceptive processing, the sensory information one receives from the movement and force of muscles and joint groups.
- **Motor Planning*** - The ability to conceive, plan, and carry out a skilled, non-habitual motor act in the correct sequence from beginning to end.
- **Motor Control*** - How the CNS (central nervous system) carries out purposeful, coordinated movements in its interaction with the rest of the body and with the environment. This includes *fine motor skills* (precise fine movements needed for writing, eating, and dressing that use the small muscles of the fingers, wrists, lips, and tongue) and *gross motor skills* (bigger movements such as rolling, crawling, walking, running) that use the large muscles in the arms, legs, torso, and feet.
- **Motor Coordination*** - Ability to use the muscles, joints, nerves and other parts of the body together to perform a particular task. This includes coordination of movements between the two sides of the body, the ability to reach across the middle of the body with the arms and legs crossing over to the opposite side (*crossing the midline*).
*Motor planning, motor control, and motor coordination are three related terms that help describe what's happening in our bodies and brains to make movements happen. Everything from the tiniest wave of a finger to a much more complicated sequence of events requires all these 3 elements.
- **Postural Control** - The ability to maintain the body’s position (balance) relative to gravity and all its segments relative to each other for stability.
- **Visual Perceptual Processing**- The ability to organize and interpret the information that is seen and give it meaning and then directing our actions accordingly. It helps us perform everyday tasks, such as reading, copying information from a board or understanding symbols.
- **Visual Motor Skills** - The skills that emerge from the integration of visual skills, visual perceptual skills and motor skills that allow us to use our eyes and hands in a coordinated and efficient way. Visual motor skills are the foundation for many of a child’s day to day activities, including writing, coloring, catching or kicking a ball, or tying shoes. When the visual and motor systems are efficiently communicating with one another these activities are easy for children to complete.
- **Neuro Reflex Integration** - The stimulation of reflex patterns to support genetic sensory-motor schemes, self-regenerating programs, strengthen sensory-motor memory. NRI facilitates stress management and PTSD recovery through support of the neurophysiological reflex circuit functions. When the reflexes do not integrate properly, difficulties with regulation, cognition, movement, attention and sensory processing occur.
- **Self-regulation** - Controlling one's behavior, emotions, and thoughts in the pursuit of long-term goals.
- **Sensory Processing**- The way the nervous system receives messages from the senses and turns them into responses.
- **Sensory Modulation**- The ability to effectively regulate the degree to which one is influenced by various sensory input.

There are many benefits to occupational therapy for children. The sooner intervention begins the more effective it tends to be. Parents who understand and embrace their child’s unique needs are empowered by Occupational Therapists to develop their child’s full potential. Consistent therapy in conjunction with implementation and follow through of the home program lead to forward progress and a healthy, happy team!