

Children's Occupational Therapy



Information for

- ◆ Patients
- ◆ Parents
- ◆ Carers
- ◆ Relatives

Children's Services

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What does a Children's Occupational Therapist (OT) do?

Occupational Therapists work with children who have difficulties which prevent them from carrying out age appropriate, everyday tasks such as:

- self-care – dressing, eating, toileting
- pre-school and school work –scissors, drawing, pre-writing, sitting and concentrating
- play and leisure – playing at the park, riding a bike, catching a ball

How Do OT's Work?

OT's help to make changes in:

- the child – helping to develop skills for every day tasks by providing advice, strategies, or delivery of a programme
- the environment – for example changing table height or type of seat used when hand writing, removing distractions
- the task – making it simpler, breaking down the steps or suggest modified equipment (e.g. pencil grip, self-opening scissors)

A child who may benefit from an OT assessment, is the child who:

- has difficulties with certain PE activities
- struggles to organise themselves and their belongings
- finds scissors difficult to use
- becomes frustrated with writing tasks
- never joins in with messy play
- is constantly on the move
- struggles with activities of daily living, such as using cutlery, dressing themselves and independence in the toilet

Functional problems can be caused by difficulties with:

1. Fine Motor Skills
2. Visual Perceptual Difficulties
3. Gross Motor Skills
4. Sensory Processing

1 - Fine Motor Skills

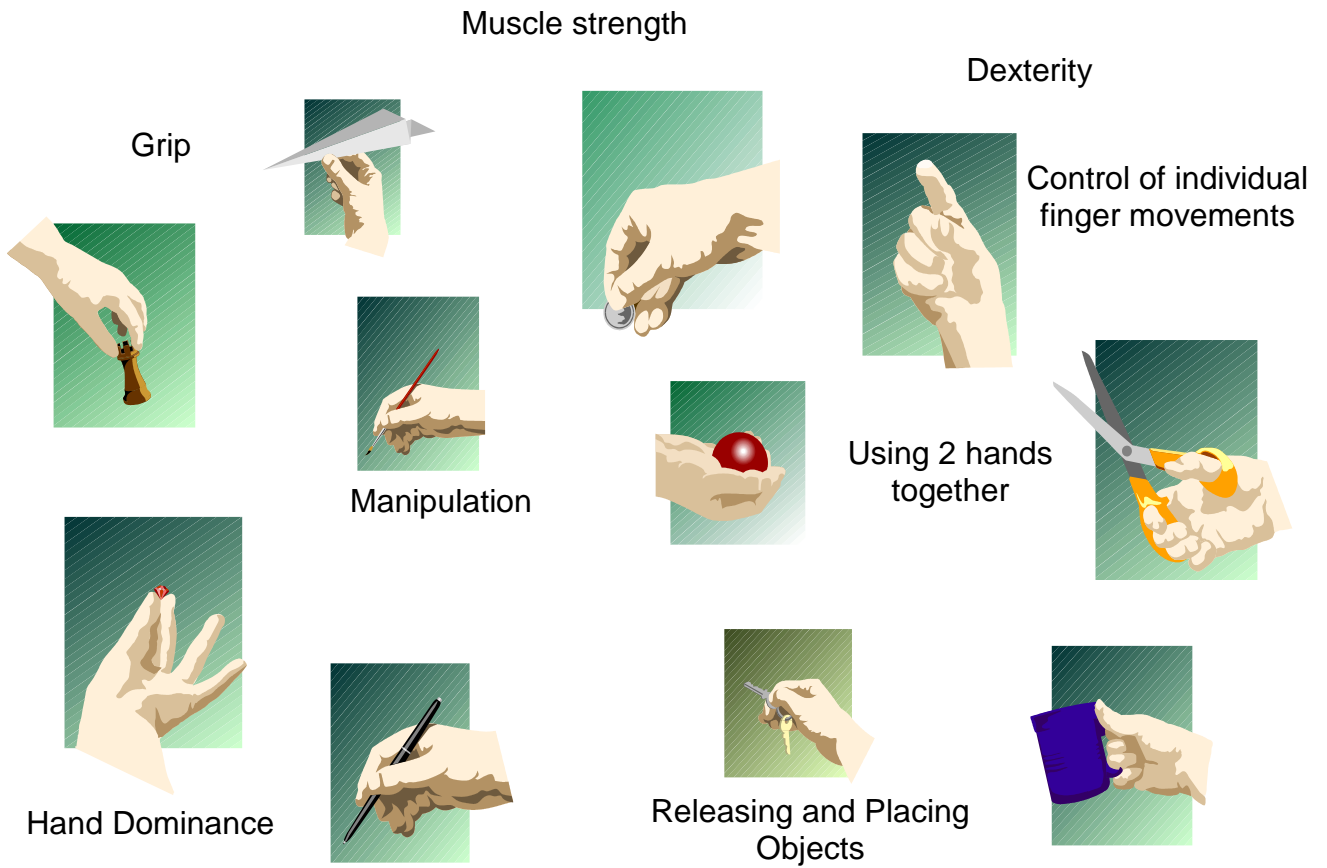
- finger Movement
- pre-writing and writing
- scissors
- cutlery
- dressing/Undressing

Children who have not developed good hand skills (fine motor skills) may have difficulties with buttons, zips and other fastenings, picking up small items, using cutlery and scissors, and may avoid pre-writing and writing activities

What do we need to improve finger movements?

- pincer activities – finger and thumb
- releasing and placing activities
- 2 hands working together (Bilateral Co-ordination)
- hand dominance
- core strength – tummy, neck and back
- strength at shoulder and pelvic girdle
- tactile awareness

Finger Movements



Play activities that help individual finger movements and strength

- activity ideas for you to try include:
- playdoh
- sand and water play
- cooking
- lego/meccano/magnetix
- bead threading
- paper fun –ripping, tearing, sticking, screwing up, paper flicks

These activities can be used to improve pincer grip, tactile awareness, and two hands working together.

Ideas for you to try

Hands and Eyes Working Together

- dot-to-dot activities of increasing complexity
- cutting out pictures or collages
- construction games – e.g. Lego or Duplo
- stencils
- model making

- brick building
- hitting a balloon with a bat
- mazes and maze boards

Pre-Writing and Hand Writing

In order to produce letters a child needs to develop the following early writing strokes.

If your child is struggling, you could try:

Pre-Writing

1. Using non-traditional writing implements such as water, painting, foam, finger paints, feely shapes, making shapes out of masking tape
2. Drawing lines in different textures i.e. sand, jelly and shaving foam

Imitate

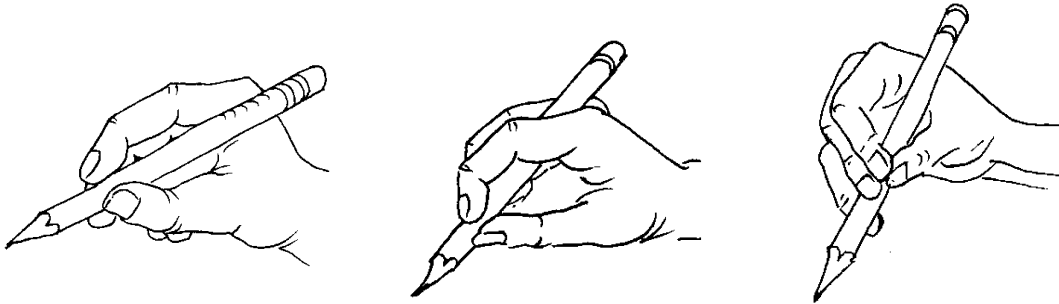
- let the child watch you draw a simple shape and then you ask the child
- to draw the same shape

Copying

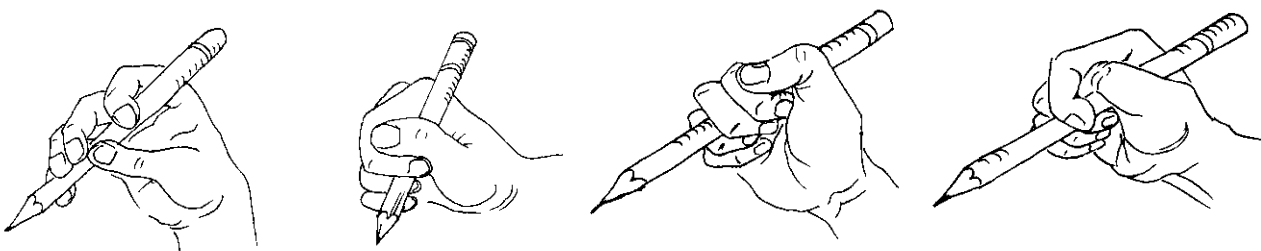
- show the child the simple shape and ask the child to copy the same shape

Pencil Grasp

Example of a Good Pencil Grasp



Example of a pencil grasp that needs to be changed



Posture

- consider sitting position
- ensure table and chairs are correct height for the child
- feet should be flat on the floor/foot rest

Scissor Skills

- ensure the child is correctly seated with appropriate scissors (particularly those who are left handed)
- allow child plenty of practice (large catalogues to cut out of are particularly useful)
- ensure the child is holding the scissors correctly - wrist not hooked with thumb on top!
- progression – snip, straight line, corners, curves

Children should be supervised at all times when using scissors.

Useful Resources to Develop Fine Motor Skills

- **Take Ten** by Sharon Drew - This useful book provides advice, games and activities to develop fine motor skills.
- **Pre-Dressing Skills** by Marsha Dunn – this useful book provides advice on successful learning programmes for teaching specific dressing and undressing tasks.

- **Success with scissors** by Alison Harris & Janet Taylor – this book provides cutting activities in a clearly guided method.
- **Fine Motor Fun** by Cherrill Flora – this book provides over 100 activities designed to improve fine motor skills

Useful Resources for Handwriting

- jumbo grip crayons
- triangular crayons
- pencil grips
- alternative pens to standard school pens
- upper and lower case tactile and magnetic letters
- specific handwriting programmes i.e. Write from the Start; Speed Up; Left Hand Writing Skills; Write Dance; Hand Writing Without Tears, Hand Writing Problems in the Secondary School

Cutlery

- ensure the size of the cutlery is suitable for your child
- the first stage will be spoon feeding
- then progress to scooping food onto spoon or fork
- then introduce stabbing food with a fork
- when successful with the above introduce using a knife and fork (soft foods such as cutting bread, banana are easier to start with)

Dressing/Undressing

- undressing is learnt before dressing so start with this first
- try a variety of ways to try a garment on and stick to the one they find easiest
- do each dressing task the same way, each time so a predictable sequence of steps is repeated
- describe what is happening as your child is getting dressed

- allow plenty of time to practice and choose a time that allows this (not before school!)
- if the child struggles to open e.g. all the buttons on a shirt, consider opening 2 buttons at the top of the shirt and taking over the head
- consider easy clothes, such as elasticated trousers/shorts, slip on shoes, polo shirts and sweatshirts when the child needs to dress unsupported

2 - Visual Perception

Is making sense of what you're looking at.

- A child with visual perceptual difficulties might have trouble with puzzles, recognising shapes and letters and be slow to learn pre-writing shapes

Ideas for you to try:

- hide and seek the child or a toy
- find the hidden object activity books
- 'I spy' games

- finding objects in the room e.g. find all the red objects, wooden objects
- picture assembly – cut up pictures and have the child put or glue them together as the original
- simple Jigsaw puzzles
- odd one out pictures
- everyday activities, such as finding a specific toy in cupboard; car in the car park, all the spoons out of the cutlery drawer

Remembering what you saw

- child talks about the story they have just read
- child matches pairs – different kinds e.g. matching coloured socks
- very basic memory games e.g. remember teddy, cup and ball

3 - Gross Motor:

- ball skills
- balance
- motor planning difficulties

Ideas to help ball skills

- clapping to pop bubbles
- rolling a ball to each other
- throwing and catch a bean bag with 2 hands
- hitting, catching and throwing a balloon
- introduce a variety of different sized and textured balls, e.g. large foam ball, tennis ball
- child claps hands before catching
- commercially available games, such as swing ball, skittles, basket ball hoops, rounders

Ideas to help balance skills

- jumping in squares
- bouncing on an exercise ball or space hopper (with support)
- three wheeled scooter – propelling with one foot
- hopping
- statues
- walking on uneven surfaces

Ideas to help motor planning

- hopscotch
- obstacle courses
- skipping with and without a rope
- animal walks
- jumping jacks
- twister

4 – Sensory

Please request additional handout if required.

Please ask if you need this information in large print, Braille or an audio version.

Help is available for people who require this information in a language other than English.

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01934 647216.