

**Who are school-based occupational therapists?**

Occupational therapists (OTs) are practitioners who use meaningful activities (occupations) to help individuals participate in daily life. In schools, occupational therapists focus on academics, play, social participation, self-care skills, and work skills. OTs are also skilled in modifying activities and environments to enhance participation in the academic environment.

**What services do occupational therapists provide in schools?**

OTs provide special education services that assist in the education process and are vital members of the educational team. The team's goal is to ensure that students benefit from their educational experiences, including:

- Assist in the assessment, design and delivery of specially designed instruction that allows students with disabilities to access and make progress in the general education curriculum.
- promote access to effective instruction, supported environment, and well-designed curriculum for students with a disability
- provide training and resources for families and school personnel
- participate as a member of collaborative teams
- participate with whole school initiatives

**What does occupational therapy look like in schools?**

Services take place within the daily routines of the school day. OTs may work directly with a student within the classroom setting, individually outside of the classroom and/or work in a consultative role with the student's team.

Occupational therapy supports students' successful participation in school in the areas of academics, behavior, and functional performance. The OT collaborates with the student's team including parents, to determine the student's needs within the educational setting. Areas in which occupational therapy may support students:

- Adaptation of activities and environments: recommend ways to modify playgrounds, classroom seating, or offer strategies to increase participation in physical education, music, art.
- Increase independence in daily life skills: work with students to address self-care and organizational needs, work with school personnel to make adaptations to bathrooms or classrooms, or train staff on proper techniques to safely transfer students who have mobility needs.
- Recommend assistive technology: assessing need for technology supports, such as pencil grips, modified seating, the use of tablets, or voice output applications to computers.
- Offer instructional strategies to classroom teachers that are beneficial to all students.
- Address sensorimotor needs that impact access, sustained engagement and participation in the curriculum. This may include the addition of sensory strategies into a

student's daily schedule to promote alertness and attention to task, as well as providing interventions to increase strength, coordination, visual perceptual, and motor skills.

**How does a student qualify for school-based occupational therapy services?**

If a student appears to have motor or sensory challenges in the classroom that interfere with his/her ability to access the school curriculum and is not responding to strategies put in place and monitored by the school team, the educational process for an OT evaluation may be initiated. Information will be gathered about the student's current abilities from the educational team, teacher records, standardized motor, perceptual or sensory assessments, and therapist documented observations. A written report will be presented at an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meeting. The educational team will determine whether OT services are necessary to access and benefit from the general education curriculum or alternative curriculum.

**How can I tell if my child is making progress with OT services?**

School-based occupational therapy practitioners document student progress as defined in the student's IEP. They use various data collection sources such as work samples, teacher records, and documented student performance observations. The frequency of progress reporting most often correlates with the local school district's grading period.

<b>How do occupational therapy services look different in a school than in a hospital or clinic?</b>	
<b>Clinical Therapy</b>	<b>School-Based Therapy</b>
Physician prescription driven	A student must be eligible for special education and require such service(s) in order to benefit from the educational program.
Therapy goals are primary.	Educational goals are primary.
To aid in recovery from injuries and surgeries as well as treatment of underlying medical and neurological conditions and the symptoms of those conditions.	To reduce the effects of acute and chronic conditions and promote success in the educational program through providing strategies, modifications or direct individualized instruction.
Services are collaborative with medical providers and parents.	Services are collaborative with other service providers, parents, and teachers.
Focus is on developmental milestones, components of movement, and performance.	Focus is on functional skills and adaptations that promote attainment of educational objectives.
Clients travel to the clinic or hospital to receive therapy from the therapist.	OT provides services in the natural academic setting for the purpose of supporting the student's educational program.

To receive school-based OT, a student must be eligible for special education and require such service(s) in order to benefit from the educational program. Additionally, school-based OTs must abide by a portion of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act titled the "least restrictive environment" mandate (LRE). When considering LRE, school-based therapists may provide services and/or supports if they are essential to allow a student to participate in the school environment and progress in the educational curriculum. In order to allow a student to

remain in the “least restrictive environment”, school-based therapists have the ability to provide educationally relevant adaptations and accommodations to increase academic success within the school environment.

Some students receive both medical-based occupational therapy and school-based occupational therapy. In other situations, students receive school-based occupational therapy only. Additionally, a student may receive medical-based occupational therapy and not receive school-based occupational therapy because the student’s ability to learn and access educational curriculum is not significantly impacted.

<b>Where can I learn more?</b>
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To learn more about school-based occupational therapy, please contact your school’s special education administrator.

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