Swell Kids

Pediatric Occupational Therapy

Little Milestones, Big Skills

A Parent's Guide to Occupational Therapy Developmental Milestones

Ages 0-5 Years

Empowering kids for a brighter tomorrow

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OT Is About Everyday Life:

Occupational therapy helps children develop the skills they need to participate in the things that matter most—playing, learning, getting dressed, eating, making friends, and becoming more independent.

FINE MOTOR

- Coloring
- Cutting
- Puzzles
- Utensils
- Fasteners

LEARNING & EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

- Attention
- Following directions
- Planning
- Problem-solving
- Transitions

GROSS MOTOR & COORDINATION

- Balance
- Coordination
- Strength
- Playground skills
- Motor planning

SELF-CARE

- Dressing
- Tooth brushing
- Toileting
- Handwashing
- Feeding & eating

SENSORY & REGULATION

- Big feelings
- Textures
- Sounds
- Body awareness
- Regulation

PLAY & SOCIALIZATION

- Pretend play
- Turn-taking
- Peer play
- Exploration
- Classroom participation

OT isn't just about skills-- it's about helping children participate and succeed in their everyday activities.

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0-12 Months

Building the Foundations

3-6 MONTHS

- Reaches towards toys
- Grasps objects
- Brings hands and objects to mouth
- Brings hands together at midline
- Begins rolling
- Pushes up on both arms during tummy time

6-9 MONTHS

- Transfers objects between hands
- Reaches while sitting
- Begins raking small objects
- Bangs toys together
- Explores toys in different ways
- Begins eating finger foods

9-12 MONTHS

- Develops a pincer grasp
- Picks up small foods / objects
- Crawls or moves independently
- Pulls to stand
- Puts objects into containers
- Releases objects intentionally

OT Tip: Floor time is skill-building time! Give your baby different opportunities to reach, roll, crawl, sit, & explore different positions.

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1-2 Years

Increasing Independence

FINE MOTOR

- Reaches towards toys
- Grasps objects
- Brings hands and objects to mouth
- Brings hands together at midline
- Begins rolling
- Pushes up on both arms during tummy time

GROSS MOTOR

- Walks independently
- Squats to pick up toys
- Climbs with supervision
- Begins stairs with help
- Throws or rolls a ball

SELF-CARE

- Helps with dressing
- Attempts to remove clothing
- Drinks from a cup
- Uses utensils
- Participates in hand washing

PLAY

- Imitates adults
- Begins pretend play
- Explores cause-and-effect toys
- Plays alongside other children

LOOKING FOR SUPPORT?

Talk with your pediatrician or pediatric OT if your child is having significant difficulty with everyday activities.

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2-3 Years

Increasing Independence

FINE MOTOR

- Builds with blocks
- Turns pages one at a time
- Copies simple lines
- Begins using scissors with help
- Strings large beads
- Completes simple peg puzzles

GROSS MOTOR

- Runs
- Jumps with two feet
- Climbs stairs with increasing independence
- Kicks a ball
- Throws forward / overhand

SELF-CARE

- Attempts dressing
- Removes simple clothing
- Uses a spoon and fork
- Drinks independently
- Helps wash hands
- Participates in toileting routines

PLAY & REGULATION

- Pretend play
- Plays alongside peers
- Follows simple routines
- Begins taking turns
- Participates in short activities

"LET ME TRY!"

Give your child opportunities to attempt everyday tasks—even when it takes a little longer.

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3-4 Years

Ready to Learn

FINE MOTOR & PREWRITING

- Uses crayons with control
- Copies vertical lines
- Copies horizontal lines
- Begins copying a circle
- Uses scissors
- Manipulates play dough

GROSS MOTOR

- Jumps forward
- Begins balancing on one foot
- Catches a large ball
- Pedals a tricycle
- Uses playground equipment

SELF-CARE

- Puts on simple clothing (shirt and shorts)
- Attempts buttons
- Uses utensils with ease
- Brushes teeth with assistance
- Participates in toileting

SCHOOL READINESS

- Sits for short activities
- Follows 2-step directions
- Cleans up with reminders
- Opens simple containers
- Participates in groups
- Transitions with support

PLAY → PRACTICE → PARTICIPATE

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4-5 Years

Building Independence & School Readiness

I CAN USE MY HANDS

- Draw basic shapes
- Draw a person
- Use scissors
- Write some letters
- Use writing tools effectively (tripod or quadropod grasp)
- Manage buttons and zippers

I CAN MOVE MY BODY

- Hope on one foot
- Run and stop with control
- Throw and catch a variety of balls (tennis and playground)
- Climb / play on equipment
- Participate in sports / play

I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF

- Dresses independently
- Manage most fasteners
- Use utensils
- Wash hands independently
- Participate in toothbrushing
- Manage toileting

I CAN PARTICIPATE

- Follow multi-step directions
- Attend to an activity from start to finish
- Manage classroom materials
- Participate in groups
- Transition between activites

School readiness isn't just about ABCs.
Children also need motor, sensory, self-care, attention, & regulation skills.

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When Should I Consider OT?

Every child develops at their own pace, but sometimes, a little extra support can make everyday activities that much easier.

1 EVERY DAY TASKS FEEL REALLY DIFFICULT

Dressing • Utensil Use • Brushing Teeth • Toileting • Completing Buttons, Zippers, or Shoes

2 FINE MOTOR TASKS ARE FRUSTRATING

Coloring • Drawing • Scissors • Pencil / Crayon Use • Blocks or Small Toys

3 YOUR CHILD SEEMS EASILY OVERWHELMED

Sounds • Crowds • Touch • Movement • Textures • Seeking or Avoiding Sensory Input • Picky / Restrictive Eating

4 TRANSITIONS & BIG FEELINGS ARE DIFFICULT

Frequent Meltdowns • Changes in Routine • Moving Between Activities • Calming After Upset

5 YOU JUST FEEL LIKE SOMETHING ISN'T QUITE RIGHT

Your child may avoid activities, struggle more than peers with routines, or need more help than expected.

What Can OT Do?

An OT evaluation can help determine whether additional support may be beneficial. An evaluation doesn't automatically mean your child needs ongoing therapy—sometimes families simply need additional information, simple home-based strategies, and reassurance.

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Easy OT Activites You Can Do At Home

BUILD THOSE HANDS

- Play dough – squish, roll, pinch, cut
- Stickers – peel, place, match
- Tongs – pick up pom poms or small objects

GET MOVING

- Animal walks – bear, crab, frog, wheel barrow
- Obstacle courses – crawl, climb, jump, balance
- Playground time – climb, swing, slide, explore

PRACTICE INDEPENDENCE

- Dressing – pull up pants or push and arm through a sleeve
- Snack time – practice opening and closing containers and utensil use
- Daily routines – help wash hands, brush teeth, clean up

HELP WITH REGULATION

- Heavy work – push, pull, carry
- Movement – jump, run, climb
- Calming – books, quiet play, predictable routines

THE BEST THERAPY ACTIVITY?

The one your child wants to do.

Follow your child's interests and build skill practice into things they already enjoy.

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Confident. Capable. Connected.

Pediatric Occupational Therapy for Growing Kids

At Swell Kids Therapy, we believe therapy should feel like play—and should make a meaningful difference in everyday life.

WE CAN HELP WITH:

- Fine motor & visual motor skills
- Self care & independence
- Sensory processing
- Emotional regulation
- Picky eating and feeding challgenges
- Play skills
- Motor coordination
- School readiness

SERVING FAMILIES LOCATED IN:

- Ladera Ranch
- Rancho Mission Viejo
- Coto De Caza
- San Juan Capistrano
- Mission Viejo
- Laguna Niguel
- Dana Point
- San Clemente

WONDERING IF OT CAN HELP?

Schedule a free 15-min parent consultation!

SCAN TO LEARN MORE!

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