

# What is Occupational Therapy?

What Is Occupational Therapy? Technically, it is defined by the American Occupational Therapy Association executive board (1976) as:

"The therapeutic use of work, self-care, and play activities to increase development and prevent disability. It may include adaptation of task or environment to achieve maximum independence and to enhance the quality of life."

The word occupation in the professional title refers to the way an individual chiefly engages his/her time, trade, profession, or business. Our occupation can therefore be defined as the way in which we occupy our time. Thus, our time is divided into three categories of activities in which we take part daily:

- **Self-Care:** sleeping, eating, grooming, dressing, and toileting
- **Work:** effort that is exerted to do or make something, or perform a task
- **Leisure:** free, unoccupied time in which one chooses to do something that is pleasurable or enjoyable (i.e., hobby, tv, socializing, sports, "chill out", read, write, listen to music, travel, etc.)

Occupation is how we spend our time; whether paid or unpaid, restful or fun, obligation or choice and that which fulfills us, gives us purpose, and allows us to interact with, be productive, and function in the world around us to the best of our ability.

If, at any point in life (whether present at birth or onset at a later time), illness, injury or disability prevents an individual from effectively or independently functioning in one or more "occupational" areas, then it is the role of **occupational therapy** to provide intervention which will help an individual regain function, maintain level of functioning, or make accommodations for any deficits that are experienced.

## Occupational Therapy for Children

Occupational therapy, more commonly associated with assisting the elderly or equipment prescription after an accident or injury, is also able to provide beneficial intervention for children. Among a child's occupational roles are learning, playing, attending, and being a friend and a family member. Disruption to these roles by injury, illness or developmental challenge may provide a context through which support by an occupational therapist could be valuable.

Occupational therapists commonly work with children with diagnoses such as autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, learning difficulties, attention deficits, and behavioural disorders.

At The Sensory Gym, treatment is designed to support children and their families when children experience difficulties in the following areas:

### **Sensory Processing Disorder**

- Over-responsivity or heightened reactivity to sound, touch or movement
- Under-responsivity to certain sensations, i.e. high tolerance to pain
- Limited food repertoire (extremely picky eater)
- Appears controlling OR overly compliant

### **Challenges Associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

- Difficulty interacting socially with peers
- Individual differences in perception of sensation
- Difficulty with transitions to new environments or novel experiences

### **Challenges Associated with Disorders of Attention (ADD, ADHD)**

- Hyperactivity OR low energy
- Poor impulse control
- Easily distracted

### **Challenges with Motor Coordination**

- Appears clumsy and frequently bumps into objects or people
- Tires easily
- Difficulty mastering typical motor skills, i.e., bike riding, shoe tying

### **Perceptual, Motor or Attentional Challenges Associated with Learning Disabilities**

- Difficulty filtering out extraneous background noise
- Visual perceptual or oculomotor deficits
- Difficulty completing homework in a timely manner due to poor organization, poor time management skills, etc.

## **Regulatory Disorders**

- Behavioural dysregulation, i.e. frequent tantrums, aggressive outburst
- Sleep dysregulation, i.e. difficulties falling or staying asleep
- Appears depressed, anxious, or obsessive in behaviours