

Frequently Asked Questions for Educators



Help ALL Students Achieve Greater Success in Academic Performance and Social Participation

Occupational therapy practitioners work in school teams to benefit all students to achieve greater success in academic performance and enhance social participation. They can support children in general education, at-risk children, and those identified for special education. Occupational therapy practitioners support educators so that students achieve adequate yearly progress and maintain appropriate school behavior necessary for learning.

How can an educator provide classroom modifications in collaboration with occupational therapy?

- **Adjust** lighting in classroom and monitor student responses. Consider modifying intensity and the impact of direct or natural lighting. Preliminary studies have shown that mood can be influenced by changes in lighting. (Golden et al., 2005).
- **Design** a quiet space within classroom for calming and for supporting the highly distractible child. A quiet corner that includes an indoor tent, blanket, earphones for classical music or beanbag chair may calm or soothe a student who may be experiencing too much stimulation from sights and sounds. Findings from a systematic review support modifying the classroom environment proactively to calm students before they become over-stimulated. (Case-Smith & Arbesman, 2008).
- **Offer** alternative seating options such as therapy balls, which studies indicate may enhance engagement and in-seat behavior. (Schilling, 2006). Check to see if the child is able to sit at his desk with his feet firmly planted on the floor. This may promote better sitting posture and less distraction during classroom time. Some students may even benefit from completing assignments while standing at the blackboard. Others may benefit from sitting on carpet swatches to set boundaries for personal space.

What strategies can support the at-risk child?

- **Pair** the at-risk child with a “buddy” for modeling behavior and promoting socialization. Findings from a systematic review indicate that using peer models may increase positive interaction. (Jackson & Arbesman, [eds], 2005).
- **Engage** students in leadership roles to promote social interaction such as distributing books or papers in the classroom or physical education (PE) supplies on the playground
- **Focus** on each student’s strengths and interests and incorporate the family input whenever possible to choose achievable, individualized goals and activities.

- **Simplify** directions into small distinct tasks to increase student attention and comprehension and recognize that students may learn best from a variety of teaching styles that include auditory, tactile, or visual cues. Implications from preliminary studies are that increasing predictability of activities and presenting information in smaller increments enables the student to better engage in tasks. (Ashburner, Ziviana & Rodger, 2008; Ganz, 2007).
- **Collaborate** with occupational therapy and other school personnel to support student access, progress, and participation in the academic and non-academic curriculum. The occupational therapy practitioner can help identify students within the general education curriculum who need further support and intervention and offer whole classroom instruction and/or consultation to support learning when appropriate.

How can an educator help students manage their emotions to promote appropriate classroom behavior?

- **Provide** daily schedules to establish routines and ease with transitions. Consider social stories, checklists, and/or logs to help any child anticipate and self-monitor his performance.
- **Help** students manage their emotions by incorporating stress reduction techniques, such as stretching or deep breathing exercises, prior to identified stressful situations like exams or transitions. Consider visual prompts such as stoplights or thermometers to help students gauge their emotions, self-advocate, and self-check for greater insight and understanding. Preliminary studies indicate that self-monitoring may improve on-task behavior and decrease disruptive behavior in classrooms. (Mitchem, Young, West, & Benyo, 2001).
- **Establish** classroom rules and set behavioral standards. Consider posting a classroom “contract” that lists specific rules of conduct.
- **Monitor** the classroom needs for activities to help promote attention and concentration. Consider water breaks and providing opportunities for movement. Observe whether involvement

in physical activity such as PE or recess prior to testing positively impacts student scores or reduces classroom disruptions.

- **Reinforce** positive behaviors throughout the school day. Establish a collaborative culture in the classroom through group oriented activities such as developing a class magazine, newspaper, or mural.
- **Utilize** small group activities such as construction tasks, making posters, and service projects to promote social participation and appropriate social behaviors (Case-Smith & Archer, 2008). Consider each child's strengths and abilities to build self-esteem and competency.

Need more information?

Occupational therapy enables people to live life to its fullest by helping them prevent-or live better after- injury, illness, or disability. Occupational therapy also encourages wellness through a balance of healthy and meaningful life activities. Occupational therapy practitioners provide service in school systems, hospitals, medical centers, and clinics. They are trained in helping people with a broad range of physical, developmental, and behavioral conditions. To learn more about the role of occupational therapy in addressing the needs of students please refer to:

<http://www.aota.org/Consumers/FactSheets/School/39473.aspx>

<http://www.aota.org/Consumers/FactSheets/Children/Transitions.aspx>

<http://www.aota.org/Consumers/FactSheets/Children/39479.aspx>

<http://www.aota.org/Consumers/FactSheets/Children/Fact-Sheet.aspx>

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