

Occupational Therapy Ideas for the Home

Occupational therapy (OT) practitioners can address many of the common concerns parents have for a child who has autism or sensory processing disorder. The goal of occupational therapy is to promote the highest level of functioning in daily life.

Occupational therapists must be creative when developing activities in order to address underlying issues and keep the child interested and engaged.

To help support the child outside of OT sessions, you can plan activities at home that promote the development of many important life skills!

IDEAS!

1) MAKE A SENSORY BIN

Sensory bins are a great way to promote a variety of skills. For example, many children with autism or SPD are sensitive to certain textures.

A sensory bin is a playful way to introduce them to a variety of tactile (touch) experiences! This activity can also promote visual perception skills, language skills, and fine-motor skills.

To make a sensory bin, simply gather common household items and place in a plastic container. Items might include cotton balls, uncooked rice or beans, popcorn, cut up paper, coins.

It is important to be aware of your child's unique sensory preferences so they are not overwhelmed, but can also develop important skills.

HEALTH AND SAFETY:

It is also very important not to leave your child alone while playing with items that can be a choking hazard

2) USE VIDEO CLIPS TO ADDRESS SOCIAL SKILLS

Children with autism typically have difficulty with **social skills**. One of the main skills commonly addressed in Occupational Therapy is perspective-taking. Often, it is difficult for them to understand what others might be feeling or thinking.

For this activity, find out what the child's favourite cartoon character is. You can then look up video clips (Youtube is a great resource) from the show. Use this as a motivating way to talk about how the characters might be feeling, what they are doing, or what they might be thinking.

This is an engaging activity and can be a helpful way to introduce emotions and different perspectives.

3) MAKE PLAY DOUGH

The activity of making play dough is not only enjoyable for kids, but it also addresses numerous important skills.

To make the dough, combine 1 cup of fine salt and 1 cup of flour in a bowl and mix. Once it is mixed well, add ½ cup water and knead and form the dough until it is smooth.

Skills addressed in this activity include:

- following directions
- exploration of textures
- vision skills

- even emotion regulation skills, like frustration tolerance

HEALTH AND SAFETY:

FOR HYGIENE REASONS AND FOR YOUR SAFETY, ALWAYS WASH HANDS THOROUGHLY BEFORE AND AFTER USE WITH SOAP AND WARM WATER.

MAKE A FRESH BATCH OF PLAYDOUGH EACH DAY AND DISCARD OLD PLAYDOUGH THAT MAY HARBOUR GERMS

4) MAKE A COPING SKILLS FLIP BOOK

Visual aids are a tool that most children with autism respond very well to. Making a coping skills flip book provides a visual aid for children to use when they are in distress.

Work with your child to come up with 5-7 things they can do when they become frustrated or need a break. Then, take pictures of your child engaging in the activities they identified. Print out these photos, laminate them, and secure with a loop ring. Some examples of coping skills might be reading a book, using a stress ball, going to a quiet space, or talking to an adult.

You can find more great ideas [here!](#)

5) ENGAGE IN A REPETITIVE ACTIVITY AS A WARM-UP

Start by engaging your child in an activity that encourages repetition, such as throwing a ball back and forth to one another or tossing bean bags back and forth. Repetitive activities activate the part of the brain involved in regulating our emotions. Starting each session with this type of activity will help your child feel calm, organized, and ready to work.

6) PLAY OT SIMON SAYS

Simon Says is a classic game children typically learn in school. It can be a great activity to try at home, too! There are many different skills that can be addressed and sensory diet activities that can be incorporated.

For example, crawling through a lycra tunnel - or under a table when at home (deep pressure) and then jumping five times (body awareness). To add a social skill component, your child can also have a turn directing you! This encourages perspective-taking and creativity.

(SCROLL DOWN TO NEXT ACTIVITY!)

MAKE AN EMOTION THERMOMETER

Typically, children with autism have trouble identifying different levels of frustration or distress. They can become over-stimulated or frustrated without much warning.

An emotion thermometer can be a helpful visual tool to assist with this. Draw or trace a thermometer on a standard piece of paper and cut it out. Then, work with your child to identify 3-5 levels they experience. For example, a 1 might be completely calm and a 3 might be starting to feel frustrated.

Let your child colour or decorate their thermometer for added motivation, fine motor skills, and visual perception skills.

Try googling 'zones of regulation' for more resources like the above.

For other strategies to help calm meltdowns, click [here!](#)

Creativity and skill-building are two of the most crucial elements of an occupational therapy session. There are so many different ways to address the necessary skills, but it is always most important to consider each child's

unique needs and interests.

Hopefully, the activities described above will provide some inspiration when planning occupational therapy activities to do at home!

