OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN THE SCHOOL

For Teachers
Suzanne Dawson (OT)
Goals of Presentation

• Outline of services offered:
  – What does an OT do at school?
  – What can we do in clinic?

• How do I know if my student needs OT?

• Action once identified

• Next steps for teachers (How can I support my student?)
About Me: Suzanne Dawson

• Graduated in 1996 – almost 20 years as an OT
• Have specialised in working with children since graduating
• Have worked as an OT in the USA and England
• Have a particular interest in developing and improving School Skills in children ages 4-12
• Have 2 sons at MBBC
What is Occupational Therapy?

OT is all about helping people succeed, by mastering their “occupational performance”.

**Occupational Performance**

is anything a person:

• Wants to do
• Is expected to do
• Has to do

As OTs we find the barriers to success, and help our clients find ways to overcome them.

What is Occupational Therapy?

Assisting with the everyday *occupations* of a child

- Self care (dressing, toileting, eating, sleeping, grooming)
- Play (social skills, imaginative play)
- Work (writing, reading, attention span, listening)
What do Occupational Therapists do?:

- Sensory Processing issues
- Toileting issues
- Attention issues
- Learning issues
- Gross motor delays
- Fine motor delays
- Handwriting challenges
- Social skill challenges
- Behavioural issues
- Emotional/behavioural regulation
- Self-care: Eating/sleeping/dressing
- Any other Occupational performance goals – e.g. Riding a bike, climbing a wall, going to the dentist calmly
How do I identify that my student needs help?

Handwriting
- Is her writing messy or illegible?
- Does she tire easily during handwriting tasks?
- Is she slow to complete handwriting tasks?
- Does she complain of a sore hand or arm?
- Does she often break the lead in her pencil?
- Does she squish her letters together, making it difficult to read?
- Does she forget to leave spaces between words?
- Does she watch her hand as she writes?
- When copying, does she need to look at the board for each word?
- Is she often stuck for ideas during creative writing tasks?
- Does she have difficulty recalling how to write letters of the alphabet?
- Does she often reverse her letters?
How do I identify that my student needs help?

**Scissor Skills**
- When he uses scissors, is the final product messy?
- Does he find scissors hard to maneuver?

**Sitting Skills**
- Does he often wriggle in his chair?
- Does he rest her head on the desk when he writes?
- Does he slouch or slump in his chair?
How do I identify that my student needs help?

**Reading & Spelling:**
- Does she often skip words or lines when reading?
- Does she forget sight words even if she has read them on the previous page?
- Does she confuse letters such as b and d?
- Does she have difficulty matching letters with their correct sounds?
- Does she have difficulty with spelling words?
- Are sight words difficult for her?
How do I identify that my student needs help?

Following Instructions & Listening:

- Does he need reminders in order to complete a task?
- Does he talk when he should be listening?
- Do you need to call his names numerous times before he will respond?
- Does he seem continually distracted?
- Is he distracted or has trouble functioning if the classroom is noisy?
How do I identify that my student needs help?

**Organization**

- Is her desk or area always messy?
- Does she forget to bring all the necessary items to school? (e.g., hat, swimmers, library books)
- Does she forget homework tasks or not have “time” to complete them?
- Does she require prompting throughout the day to stay on task?
- Is she a daydreamer or does she distract other children?
- Does she leave behind items such as her swimming bag, hat, homework?
- Does she become upset if routines are altered or changed?
How do I identify that my student needs help?

Self Care Skills

- Does he ask for help to get dressed after swimming?
- Does he have difficulty or ask for assistance with tying shoelaces?
- Does he need reminders to use the bathroom throughout the day?
- Does he have difficulty/need assistance with opening drink bottles/lunchbox?
- Does he have difficulty/need assistance with opening food wrapper? (eg. snack bar wrapper, glad wrap, popper straws etc)
- Is he a messy eater?
- Does he dislike having messy hands? (eg. with glue or sand)
- Does he become easily upset by small injuries (ie. bruises his knee)
How do I identify that my student needs help?

**Friendships & Play:**
- Does she have difficulty making or keeping friends?
- Does she become easily frustrated or have a tantrum when things don’t go her way?
- Does she become bossy or the dominant character in a group?
- Does she have difficulty understanding how someone is feeling on their facial expressions alone?
- Does she respond negatively or avoid areas such as the sandpit or pool?
- Does she have difficulty initiating play with other children?
- Does she prefer to play in parallel with another child (ie. playing next to another child, but not joining their game)
- Does she have difficulties with pretend play skills?
How do I identify that my student needs help?

**Gross Motor Skills:**
- Is he clumsy or does he easily trip over objects?
- Does he bump into other children when lining up for class?
- Does he tire easily during physical education or active tasks?
- Does he avoid spinning, jumping, running activities?
- Does he have difficulty with ball skills?
- Is he hesitant to use playground equipment?
How do I identify that my student needs help?

Any other functional issues that affect your pupil’s occupational role as a Student
When to refer to an OT

• A child is not progressing and normal strategies are not working

• A child is excessively avoiding activities and your strategies are not working

• A child has excessive stress related to sensory processing, learning or motor challenges and your strategies are not working
Foundations for Learning

Sound Learning is built on solid foundations!

- Sensory processing
- Good Health
- Healthy Sleep Habits
- Healthy Nutrition
- Supportive & nurturing environment
- Engaged and connected relationships

Engine Speed = Arousal Level

- **Low** - When it is difficult to get moving - feeling low, lethargic, poor motivation and hard to get going.

- **Just Right/ Calm Alert** - When it is easy to concentrate, learn and complete daily tasks

- **High** - When it is hard to slow down or stop. This is marked by anger, rage, anxiety, stubborn-ness/ rigidity, poor attention, hyperactive behaviour and difficulty sitting still.

  **Frontal lobe (executive functioning) & Reasoning only work well when engines are “Just Right”**
Too much Stress response

- **Flight** - demonstrate verbal and non-verbal avoidance behaviour
- **Fright** - demonstrate fear and anxiety in many situations and tasks
- **Fight** - demonstrate negative or resistive behaviour and language and can be physically or verbally aggressive.
Action once identified

Step 1: Request your student to get an OT assessment and find out why your he/she is having these difficulties

Step 2: Provide some written referral information to the therapist regarding your concerns (each school will have our new referral pads)

Step 3: Liaise with therapist as needed

Step 4: Give feedback to therapist and parents regarding the outcome
What Therapy looks like at School Clinic

• Half hour therapy sessions
• Work on handwriting remediation, pencil grasp correction, paragraph and story writing, personal organization, attention in class.
• Work closely with teacher – benefit of being onsite is that the teacher can liaise with OT more easily, face-to-face.

Image from: http://www.autismmind.com/images/general/visual-sensory-processing-disorder-1.jpg
What Therapy looks like in the Clinic

• 50 minute sessions
• In the clinic there is access to sensory gym equipment
• Can work on same areas as at the school clinic, plus more sensory & gross motor skill development
What can I do to support my student?

Visit our Website: www.kidsmatters.com.au

See Teachers’ strategies at:
What can I do to support my student?

• Check pencil grasps of your students – it really is important (Peter Pilot Analogy)
  – The Crossover Pencil grip

• Check that your students’ engines are running on “just right” so they can learn
  – Enough movement -> break time is important
  – Breaks (cards, errands, separate space)
  – Air filled cushions
Want to know more????

Sensory Processing Disorder seminar on June 13th, 2015
9:30am-12:00 noon (+ question time)
Cost = $75
At Yeerongpilly Clinic

Ph: 3392 6133 to book

By Vivienne Williams (Principal Occupational Therapist)
Questions?