



DOES MY CHILD NEED OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?

Sensory Processing Skills

As children grow and develop, they receive constant information about their world through their senses. These include the five external senses of touch, taste, hearing, sight and smell, as well internal senses of movement and balance (vestibular sense) and body position (proprioceptive sense). Sometimes there are difficulties in the way children process sensory information. It can become a bit like a traffic jam in the brain with some messages getting through, some not registering and some over registering. When this happens, we see certain features in a child's behaviour. The most common sensory processing disorders are 'sensory seeking' and 'sensory avoiding/defensiveness'. Common red flags of these disorders are listed below:

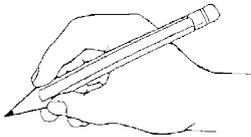
- Demonstrates sensory seeking behaviours (e.g. excessive moving, fidgeting, putting things in mouth, makes noise for noise sake, fixates on visual things, sniffs objects)
- Has difficulty sitting still and attending/concentrating appropriately
- Has difficulty with transitions between activities or to and from preschool/school
- Has difficulty sustaining play at one activity for more than a few minutes at a time
- Demonstrates sensory avoiding behaviours (e.g. adverse reactions to touch, noise, light, smell, movement experiences, food/drink)
- Becomes overwhelmed easily
- Struggles with changes to routine or expectations
- Has difficulty getting to or staying asleep
- Moves excessively during sleep
- Melts down or tantrums regularly
- Seems on the edge or fragile
- Becomes regularly aggressive
- Becomes emotional frequently
- Regularly go into 'frozen' or 'shut down' states

Fine Motor Skills

Fine motor skills are those that involve small muscles performing precision tasks. They include require planning and communication between the brain (the thinker) and the muscles (the doers). Successful fine motor actions rely on stability from other parts of the body. As a child grows and develops the achievement of fine motor milestones is expected. Problems with fine motor skills are most commonly found in the following categories: difficulty manipulating objects in the fingertips, pencil grasp, operating scissors, drawing and handwriting. To determine whether your child may be experiencing fine motor issues, ask yourself the following questions. Common red flags for fine motor skills are listed below:

- Has difficulty using a pincer grasp (thumb opposing index finger) or manipulating objects in their fingertips?
- Has an age appropriate pencil grasp (see guidelines below)?
- Has immature drawings compared to other children of their age?
- Has difficulty operating scissors (three years and older)?
- Has difficulty with handwriting letter formation, reversals, case confusion, number formation, alignment on dotted thirds, speed, spacing between words and letters (school age only)?
- Teacher has reported concerns

Pencil grasp age guidelines



Dynamic tripod (thumb and index finger opposing and third finger underneath pencil shaft)

4 years +



Static tripod (thumb and index finger opposing and third finger on top of pencil shaft)

3 years



Digital pronate

2 years



Fisted

0-2 years

Please note that the thumb wrap and four/five finger pencil grasps are not equivalent to a tripod grasp and suggest issues of delay that should be investigated.



Thumb wrap



Four/five fingered

Gross Motor Skills

Gross motor skills are those involving large muscles or muscle groups to perform whole body movements. They include walking, running, jumping, hopping, climbing and many more. To successfully perform gross motor tasks, a child requires body awareness, muscle strength, endurance, equilibrium (balance), motor planning (praxis) and the ability to coordinate several body parts together. As a child grows and develops the achievement of gross motor milestones is expected. To determine whether your child may be experiencing gross motor issues, ask yourself the following questions. Does your child:

- Copy actions in songs (2 years and older)?
- Successfully negotiate themselves around playground obstacles?
- Demonstrates ball skills at a similar level to their peers (e.g. kicking, throwing, catching, rolling)?
- Move around without regularly tripping or falling?
- Coordinate both sides of their body well?
- Sustain appropriate amounts of energy throughout gross motor activities and across the day?
- Balance and hop on one leg (3 years and older)?

Activities of Daily Living

Activities of daily living form the nuts and bolts of the child's day. They are the things children can't get by without (sleeping, eating, dressing, bathing, grooming). If your child is experiencing regular difficulty with any activity of daily living, they would benefit from an OT assessment.

Play

Play is an essential part of growth and development for every child. It provides a framework for exploration and understanding of their world. Playing with peers is a crucial part of social and emotional development for the child. To determine whether your child may be experiencing issues with play, ask yourself the following questions. Does your child:

- Freely explore their environment without fear and inhibition?
- Know how to enter into play effectively with peers (3 years and older)?
- Can your child share and take turns with other children (2.5 years and older)?
- Does your child engage in a variety of play activities?
- Does your child demonstrate imaginative (3 years and older)?