

IS YOUR CHILD POSITIONED FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS?



SCHOOL SUCCESS can be measured by both academic performance and social participation. Your child must be ready to manage the demands of classroom instruction as well as demonstrate appropriate behavior on the playground, in the cafeteria, and other areas.

Occupational therapy practitioners help students succeed in all school activities throughout the day. They are important members of the school team to help children learn, make friends, and play. The following tips are from occupational therapy practitioners who work with elementary school age children.

If you want your child to:

Consider these activity tips:

An occupational therapy practitioner offers expertise to:

Complete homework successfully.

- Set up an area for homework with good lighting, away from TV and other distractions.
- Keep track of how long it takes your child to complete homework assignments, and share this information with the school team as needed.
- Recognize the unique learning style of your child and adjust homework completion as needed. For example, some children learn best by reading, whereas others learn best when they hear information.

- Make it easier for your child to learn by modifying assignments, changing desk heights or positions, and offering additional assistance.
- Address underlying sensory components (taste, smell, touch, and/or sounds) that affect learning and behavior.
- Work with the teacher to modify the way he or she presents materials to address different learning styles.

Use computer time effectively.

- Create a computer workstation with the top of the screen at eye level and the feet flat on the floor.
- Use parental controls to block Web sites that have inappropriate content.
- Encourage stretching breaks during computer or homework time to increase concentration and decrease irritability or fatigue.

- Perform an ergonomics evaluation of your child's computer workstation to minimize posture and repetition injuries.
- Provide assistive technology to help your child use materials in a different way if necessary (e.g., convert typed words to voice; suggest a different mouse or keyboard; use voice recognition software; introduce helpful apps).

Use school materials properly.

- Provide your child with a variety of school materials and supplies in different shapes and sizes. For example, writing may improve when using a mechanical pencil or a ballpoint pen.
- Be sure your child's backpack is no heavier than 10% of his or her weight, and use the waist straps to secure it.

- Provide adaptations such as special paper, zipper pulls, scissors, or built-up pencils to help children with fine motor activities such as zipping and handwriting.
- Screen children for proper backpack size and weight to prevent injury.
- Collaborate and consult with the school team to address proper positioning and tool use throughout the school day.

If you want your child to:

Develop appropriate social skills and behavior necessary for learning.

Consider these activity tips:

- Demonstrate good manners and cooperation at home. Establish a regular dinner time for all family members to interact.
- Encourage extracurricular activities based on your child's interests and abilities.
- Play board games that require good sportsmanship, concentration, and rule-following.
- Build your child's sense of responsibility and being part of a team by asking him or her to assist in household chores.

An occupational therapy practitioner offers expertise to:

- Work with school staff to include more physical activity throughout the school day to help improve attention and behavior.
- Recommend after-school activities individualized to your child's abilities and goals.
- Lead activity groups at lunchtime to address school initiatives such as anti-bullying or obesity prevention.
- Collaborate with parents by conducting in-services and providing home programs that address social skills.

Want More Information?

If you would like to consult an occupational therapist about positioning for school success, talk to your child's teacher about whether a referral to occupational therapy is appropriate. Your physician, other health professionals, and your school district's director of special education may also be able to help. Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are trained in helping children succeed by addressing both physical and mental issues. You can find additional information through the American Occupational Therapy Association at www.aota.org.

Occupational therapy is a skilled health, rehabilitation, and educational service that helps people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations).

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