School Tips for Parents: Academic Success & Social Participation

Occupational therapy can help students succeed in academic performance and social participation. Occupational therapy practitioners use their unique expertise to help children with and without disabilities be prepared for and perform important learning and school-related activities to fulfill their roles as students. In the school setting, occupational therapy practitioners support academic and non-academic outcomes, including social skills, math, reading, writing, recess, participation in sports, self-help skills, prevocational or vocational participation, and more. They are particularly skilled in facilitating access to curricular and extra-curricular activities for all students through support, design planning, promoting healthy routines, and other methods. The goal is for students to build upon their strengths while developing academic and social skills necessary for future independent living.

Tips for Academic Success

- Establish a homework buddy system with another student in the same class to promote good study habits and monitor missed work due to absences.
- Monitor the amount, intensity, and length of time that completing homework requires to assess stress levels and maintain a healthy balance of schoolwork and leisure time.
- Consider your child's posture and position when using homework tools such as backpacks, computer stations, classroom materials, and desks. Refer to "Backpack Strategies for Parents and Students" to analyze weight, size, and high for proper fit.
- If sensory components inherent within school environments such as lighting, smells, and sounds affect your child's school performance, consult an occupational therapy practitioner.
- Help your child develop self advocacy skills necessary for independence by encouraging him or her to ask questions and express his or her needs in school.

Tips for Social Participation

- Participate in community resources such as PTA, school-sponsored activities, and recreational facilities that strengthen your child's sense of belonging and build friendships.
- Communicate regularly with educators, administrators, paraeducators, and other support staff to share feedback. Keep a journal or log to organize your ideas while monitoring your child's progress.
- Identify and build on the strengths and abilities of your child as well as the family as a whole by incorporating individual and shared activities that are both achievable and realistic.
- Promote extracurricular activities that interest your child and use his or her strengths.
- Provide leadership opportunities for your child that make a notable contribution such as completing chores for neighbors or reading to a younger student.
- Ask for help when needed. The school team is ready to listen and will answer your questions.
- Model positive behavior by listening to your child's concerns, demonstrating problem solving, and making healthy lifestyle choices for you and your child.
- Monitor your child's habits and routines in sleep, diet, and activity. Note any significant changes, and share this information as appropriate with school medical professionals.

Occupational therapy is a science-driven, evidence-based profession that enables people of all ages to live life to its fullest by helping them promote health and prevent—or live better with—illness, injury, or disability.

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