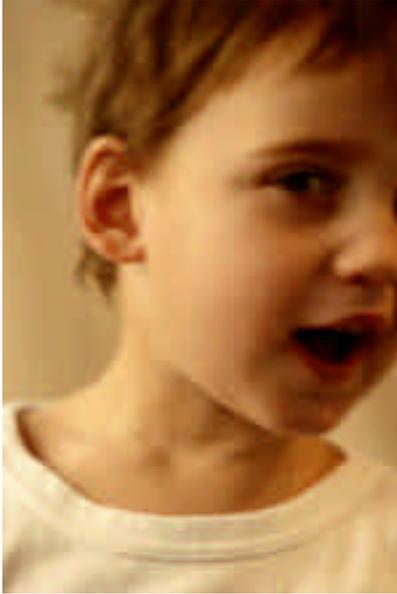


Understanding Autism



Autism is a developmental disability that affects how the brain functions, specifically those areas of the brain that control social ability and communication skills. Boys are more likely to develop autism, and most children are diagnosed before the age of 3.

Children and adults with autism typically have difficulty in both verbal and nonverbal communication. People with autism may have a difficult time relating to the outside world and may have unusual reactions to the people around them. People with autism may demonstrate aggressive behavior that may cause injury to themselves or others. The disorder also may cause sensitivity to the senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.

Occupational therapy can provide intervention that helps children to develop appropriate social, play, and learning skills. The therapist aids the child in achieving and maintaining normal daily tasks such as getting dressed and playing with other children.

What can an occupational therapist do?

- **Evaluate** a child to determine if he or she has accomplished tasks appropriate to the child's age, such as dressing and play skills.
- **Provide** intervention to help a child appropriately respond to information coming through the senses. Intervention may include developmental activities, sensory integration, and play activities.
- **Facilitate** play activities that aid a child in interacting and communicating with others.

What can parents and families do?

- **Join** a support group for parents and families of children with autism. Families of people with autism can experience high levels of stress because of the child's challenging behavior and the financial demands.
- **Collaborate** with the occupational therapist and other medical and educational professionals to encourage improvement in social skills and daily tasks.

Need more information?

Autism is one of the most common developmental disabilities in children. If you would like to consult an occupational therapist, your physician, other health professionals, and your school district's director of special education may have information on how you can access an occupational therapist in your area.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are trained in helping children and adults with a broad range of physical, developmental, and behavioral issues in addition to autism, such as proper backpack and computer use, and the development of handwriting skills.