Occupational Therapy Practice Opportunities
Enhancing Services for Autistic Individuals*

Document Purpose: Using an interactive, participatory design process, create actionable, practical strategies that promote high quality evidence- and occupation-based practices for occupational therapy practitioners to use in their everyday practices and to cultivate practice expansion and leadership.

*Identity-first language is used in the title and throughout the proposal as recommended by members of the autism community.

Occupational Therapy Scope
Use the full scope of occupational therapy to meet the diverse occupational performance and participation needs experienced by autistic individuals.

“OT provides a client-centered, scientific, and holistic approach to address meaningful life activities.”

Evidence-Based Practice
Demonstrate that OT services are data driven and provide value across a continuum (i.e., range of ages; sectors such as health and education; and approaches such as screening and interventions).

“OT prioritizes scientific evidence to offer strength-based, client-centered solutions across sectors.”

Neurodiversity, Acceptance, and Inclusion
Promote occupational justice (e.g., inclusion, community participation) for autistic individuals and their families.

“OT is a key partner in improving community inclusion and neurodiversity by identifying and reducing barriers to participation.”
### Everyday Actions

- Maintain occupation-based focus throughout the OT process, including intervention, documentation, and formal/informal meetings.¹²
- Connect OT practices to health, well-being, quality of life, and safety (e.g., oral care, sensory processing differences, water safety, elopement) across the lifespan.¹²,³
- Use a lifespan approach by addressing various transitions from early childhood to healthy, productive aging.²,³
- Share OT value (e.g., links to articles, core practice resources) on social media, through newsletters, and on other platforms.⁴

### Practice Expansion and Leadership

- Meet with community organizations and provide an in-service to answer questions about the role and science of OT.²
- Share resources that articulate the OT role in transition planning and services for autistic students in high school, and ask an administrator to include OT as part of the transition team.²
- Advocate for the distinct value of OT within the interprofessional team.⁵
- When working in the community, use published screeners to detect signs of autism in early development (e.g., preschools, clinics, OT in primary care).²

### Occupational Therapy Scope

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence-Based Practice</th>
<th>Neurodiversity, Acceptance, and Inclusion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Create data collection systems that measure occupational performance and patient experience of care (including quality and satisfaction; improved health among populations served; and ways that OT services reduce the cost of care).²,⁵,⁶</td>
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<td>- Collect, analyze, display (e.g., charts, graphs, work samples), and share data to quantify and illustrate progress, including occupational performance.¹</td>
<td>- Anticipate and reduce or eliminate barriers, especially those related to sensory features of the environment/task and others’ attitudes and beliefs.²,³,⁷,⁸</td>
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<td>- Offer interventions with the strongest research support first (i.e., systematic reviews, meta-analysis of RCTs, &amp; RCTs).⁷</td>
<td>- Offer leisure coaching across the lifespan, especially for autistic adults.⁷</td>
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<td>- Search and share professional and interprofessional literature for evidence-based practices consistent with OT domain and process.⁶</td>
<td>- Partner with families to identify areas of resources and needs to support social participation.³,⁸</td>
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<td>- Highlight and make explicit evidence- and data-based decision making.⁶</td>
<td>- Promote client self-advocacy and self-determination by amplifying autistic perspectives and contribution.⁹,¹⁰</td>
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<td>- Connect targeted, team-generated (including client) outcomes to state measures such as SSIPs. Use participation outcome measures and connect to the Triple aim of health care.¹,⁷</td>
<td>- Partner with autistic clients, especially in late adolescence and adulthood, using a strengths-based approach to include expertise and preferred interests when developing employment opportunities, social networks, and community participation.¹⁰,¹¹</td>
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### Neurodiversity, Acceptance, and Inclusion

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<td>- Develop compelling lived experience narratives that integrate data to show how OT supports academic success, independent living, or employment. Share these data-based narratives with stakeholders.²,⁴</td>
<td>- Contribute to public comments and local advocacy efforts regarding parity, reimbursement, and recognition of the ways that neurodiversity improves communities.⁷,¹²</td>
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<td>- Tell a stakeholder a story about meeting a client need for independent living or employment and how this could be applied to your program or setting.</td>
<td>- Contact autistic self-advocates to include in community-level programs and research projects.¹⁰,¹²</td>
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<td>- Partner with a university to improve evidence-based practices and/or participate in research.¹⁰</td>
<td>- Create family and youth partnerships by contacting local community groups.¹²,²⁴</td>
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<td>- Develop and/or propose an occupation-based pilot program with other community members and share its potential value for stakeholders (e.g., museums, gardens, job sites).²,¹⁰</td>
<td>- Partner with cultural and community venues (e.g., museums, airports, theaters, parks) to support inclusion and accessibility for autistic individuals.¹⁰,¹⁶</td>
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<td>- Do what matters now.⁴</td>
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<td>- Practice with purpose.²</td>
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<td>- Think about the future.¹⁰</td>
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<td>- Do what matters for others.³</td>
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Please reference additional resources available on CommunOT.
Beginning in 2017, the AOTA Autism Community of Practice used an iterative, participatory design process to revise the 2011 document, "AOTA Resources to Support Pediatric Practice: Challenges and Opportunities for Children and Youth with an Autism Spectrum Disorder."

This revision replaces the 2011 document Challenges and Opportunities (AOTA Autism Community of Practice [formerly Autism Workgroup; 2011]).

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