



## **Occupational Therapy Role in the School: Partnering for Change Model**

### **Who are Occupational Therapists?**

Occupational therapists (OTs) are regulated health care professionals who work with children in a variety of settings, including schools. As children grow and develop, they learn to do many things, including taking care of themselves, managing their school work, playing sports or developing a leisure interest/hobby. Sometimes, children have more problems than is typical for their age with motor skills. This can make everyday activities a challenge to learn and master. OTs know a lot about the development of gross and fine motor skills. Fine motor skills are important for success with daily tasks such as printing, drawing, cutting with scissors and doing up buttons and zippers. Gross motor skills are necessary for stable posture, skipping, running, catching balls and riding a bike. When children have difficulties with these daily activities because of a motor problem, it is hard to fully participate in the things they need to do, want to do, or are expected to do at home, at school and in the community. Occupational therapists can help teachers and parents better understand and help these children succeed with everyday activities.

### **What will the Occupational Therapist do?**

In the Partnering for Change Model, OTs will work as part of the school team. The OT will provide education and resources to teachers and parents about how children typically develop motor skills and how to promote this development in the classroom and at home. The OT will help teachers learn to recognize and help children who may have a motor skills problem which is making some daily activities a challenge to learn or master.

### **Specific contributions by the occupational therapist can include:**

#### **Assistance in the development of the individual learning profiles.**

- By working alongside the teacher, the OT can observe students participating in daily activities at their locker, in the classroom, on the playground and/or in gym. The OT can help the teacher learn to observe motor skills and identify students where motor difficulties may be impacting on learning or participation. The OT can help the teacher learn strategies that work within the classroom to help these students succeed.

#### **Aid in the development of differentiated instructional strategies.**

- For students having difficulty with tasks requiring motor skills, OTs can help the teacher to learn and use effective instructional strategies. OTs can make recommendations around instructional, environmental and assessment accommodations to facilitate student success and the development of motor skills.
- OTs can teach a lesson for an activity that requires motor coordination (e.g.: cutting with scissors, printing, cursive writing, keyboarding, Quality Daily Fitness routine) to transfer knowledge to teachers about instructional strategies for students with motor challenges, and how to facilitate development of motor skills at a grade/age appropriate level.

#### **Recommendations for materials, tools and/or technology to facilitate learning.**

- OTs have much expertise in the adaptation of materials and tools to help individuals function to the best of their ability. For children with motor difficulties, adaptations to seating and desks, writing implements, paper, student agendas, worksheets, and

storage of personal belongings are commonly recommended. Use of a computer may be recommended to help with writing.

- OTs can help teachers design grade appropriate classroom centres and share resources to help students develop motor skills.

**Participation in enhancing teacher capacity through in-service and the provision of resources.**

- By sharing their knowledge and working collaboratively with teachers, OTs can enhance teacher capacity. This might occur through working together with regard to a single student, the full class or more formally in workshops, presentations, in-services and the sharing of resources at a school or school board level.

**Access to community resources that can help the student, the family and the teacher.**

- Occupational therapists can serve as a bridge between the health care system and the educational system. They bring knowledge of child development, anatomy and physiology and developmental disorders and the health and medical services available in the community.