

Learning Through Play

Tips for Living

What can an occupational therapist do?

- ☑ Evaluate a child's motor (movement), cognitive (thinking, reasoning), social-emotional, and behavioral development.
- ☑ Recommend toys and play activities that promote healthy development and provide stimulation to the child.
- ☑ Intervene when needed to promote development and skills for living.



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The act of playing is an important tool that influences a child's life.

The primary goals of childhood are to grow, learn, and play. It is often through play that children learn to make sense of the world around them. It is a child's "job" or "occupation" to play to develop physical coordination, emotional maturity, social skills to interact with other children, and self-confidence to try new experiences and explore new environments.



Occupational therapists have expertise in evaluating children's neurological, muscular, and emotional development; and determining the effects of infant and childhood illness on growth and development.

What can parents and families do?

- ☑ Encourage exploratory play by using balls, sand and water toys, slides, swings, finger paints, and magnets. During exploratory play, children use their senses as they explore, discover, examine, and organize their activities.
- ☑ Try manipulative play by asking the child to perform a task, such as stacking cereal boxes, slipping coins into a piggy bank, or playing with a deck of cards. Handling items such as puzzles, pegboards, beads, and lacing cards test the child's eye and hand coordination and dexterity.
- ☑ Suggest imaginative or symbolic play that includes role-playing, playing with dolls and stuffed animals, toy furniture, and telephones. This type of pretend play encourages good social skills and a positive self-image.
- ☑ Choose toys that are appropriate for the child's age. They do not have to be expensive or complicated to be beneficial to the child. Common objects, such as pots and pans, empty boxes, spools of thread, shoelaces, and wooden spoons can stimulate activity. The best toys require active participation.
- ☑ Remember when choosing a toy to consider whether a child must be supervised while playing with it. Toys should not have small parts that break easily or that can be swallowed.