

## How do I find an occupational therapist?

Schools should contact their local children's occupational therapy service to discuss how occupational therapy could assist their organisation.

Parents/carers should ask their school's learning support teacher, class teacher, GP, social worker or other health or social care professional for a referral to occupational therapy. Self-referral may also be available in some areas.

To arrange a private consultation with an independent occupational therapist, who will charge you a fee, please visit [www.cotss-ip.org.uk](http://www.cotss-ip.org.uk).



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**Occupational therapy**  
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For more information about occupational therapy, visit the College of Occupational Therapists website.

**College of Occupational Therapists Limited**  
*The professional body for occupational therapy staff*

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Occupational therapy in **SCHOOL**

College of  
Occupational  
Therapists



Specialist Section  
Children,  
Young People  
& Families

CON0053

**Occupational therapy**  
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## Occupational therapy enhances engagement and participation in school life

Children and young people learn, play and socialise in school. Whilst most children find participating in activities (or occupations) such as writing a story, playing in the playground or finding their way around the school manageable, these present challenges for some children and young people.

## Why use an occupational therapist?

Occupational therapists are trained to understand the whole person, including physical, mental health, emotional and behavioural needs and their impact on school life. Occupational therapists have the expertise to work in both mainstream and specialist school settings.

## When is occupational therapy needed?

Occupational therapy is needed when established school support is in place and the child or young person continues to experience issues with their school occupations. In partnership with the school staff, child or young person and parents/carers, strategies for enhancing participation will be explored, for example:

- Changing the way the school task is done
- Outlining modifications to the environment
- Recommending or providing equipment
- Teaching the child, young person or staff new techniques
- Developing the child or young person's skills and abilities

## What areas do occupational therapists focus on in the school?

- School work – including following instructions, working with others, keeping on task, writing, drawing, cutting and pasting, using the computer or playing sport.
- Life skills – for example, putting on and taking off coats or shoes, changing for sport, using the toilet, eating lunch and managing belongings.
- Break time and play – such as joining in games, talking with others and making friends, or using break times to recharge for the rest of the day.
- Transitions – such as stopping one task and starting another, moving between classes, or changing settings from primary to secondary school, or transitioning to further and higher education or work.

Occupational therapists may also be asked to contribute to a child or young person's Special Education Needs assessment or learning support plan.



## How can occupational therapy services be provided?

### A whole class or whole school (universal) approach

Collaborating with teachers and staff by providing relevant training and consultation for whole school or whole class approaches. Occupational therapists can advise on reasonable adjustments, support the school's handwriting policy development, suggest environmental adaptations to support the canteen routine, or ensure the playground is inclusive.

### A targeted or group approach

Working with individuals or groups of children or young people on activities such as improving dressing or writing skills, keeping focused on a task, making friends or planning transitions.

### A specialist approach

Including individualised services with focused support for a child or young person in the school. An occupational therapist can provide a specialist chair so the child or young person can access table-top activities, working with technology providers to support a child or young person's access to the curriculum or develop skills to play with peers during break times.