



## **Cathy Horder (Occupational Therapist)** ***The role of the Occupational Therapist***


When parents come to see an occupational therapist they will come in, some with some understanding of what to expect, others with very little, because as the name doesn't actually give them any explanation as to what we are about.

Traditionally, occupational therapists have looked at movement; motor skills, and how a child uses their large muscles to move and jump and run, we look at how they use their small muscles - their fine motor skills to use their hands to reach, and grasp and manipulate objects, how also they may use their fine motor muscles around their mouth in their eating, and their chewing. We are very much focused on movement.


OT's are also very interested in how a child interprets and makes sense of sensation, so that sensation comes into their bodies through their ears, through their eyes, through their skin, just through their body moving they get internal messages being sent back to their central nervous system about what their body is doing. How well a child makes sense of all of that sensory information then impacts on how well they make a movement response. So that is one area that we are keenly interested in understanding but we also want to see then how does that impact a child's ability and desire to participate in the functions of life. They have to take care of themselves, they have to be a self-maintainer, they have to take care of eating and bathing, and toileting, all of those skills that we need to all learn to take care of ourselves. They need to be able to play and be a player, they need to be able to acknowledge and hear and look and respond to their peers. They need to be a learner or a worker in the classroom so again they need to be able to make sense of what they are hearing and seeing and feeling and what the requirements of that environmental task is. So no matter which environment they are moving in or the task or the people that they are with, they are constantly having to make sense of the sensory information that they are getting and then using their muscles as well as their emotions as motivation to drive them to take part.

OT's are very much about, how do they function, how well do they function, what impacts their function, and ability to perform those roles in life.

What I think is really important for parents to realise is that every family has to find the model of intervention that works best for them. That will be different as families are different, children are different, and I think it's really important that parents seek out the model of intervention and the therapist that they feel most comfortable achieving their hopes and expectations with. You may look at one occupational therapy session and it may be quite different to another occupational therapy session and it will depend very much on the individuals.



When I trained it was very much more traditional OT and we did a lot of skills-based training and a lot of focus on developing motor skills, and then understanding sensory processing and delivering certain activities that we believed helped to calm and center a child. Then I became a little bit more interested in how can we move this forward and engage the child more emotionally so that the parents feel that they can go home and get that same connection, so I ended up looking at a number of different



options and did some training in DIR Floortime. For me as a therapist and as an individual, it sits very comfortably, and therefore I feel that I can engage with the parents in that model more easily. There will be other therapists that have models of intervention that fit very comfortably with them. That is a wonderful thing because there are options for families.

*\*\* This is an approximate transcription only; minor modifications have been made to assist the reader.*