

A Parent's Guide to

**PHYSICAL THERAPY
and
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
in
Educational Programs**

Special education is specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), school districts are required to provide special education to students who have:

**BOTH
a documented disability**

**AND....
who need specially designed
instruction.**

Related Services are designed to assist a child to benefit from his/her special education program. Both OT & PT are related services. OT and PT are provided when a child needs them in order to accomplish IEP or IFSP goals.

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Distributed by:

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OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AND PHYSICAL THERAPY SERVICES FOR SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

As a general rule, the activities of school OT's and PT's fall into four categories for children ages 3 to 21.

- **School therapists evaluate the sensory motor functioning of students with disabilities and assist in determining service needs.** They evaluate skills such as walking, eating, sitting up or hand-use.
- **School therapists address access to education for students with disabilities and assist in determining service needs.** Examples might include modifying the child's school chair, adapting the computer keyboard or providing information to the school about ways to make the building or playground more accessible.
- **School therapists address safety of students and school staff.** They provide consultation and instruction relating to equipment needs and specialized procedures for lifting, feeding or physical management.
- **School therapists help teach sensory-motor skills associated with success in school.** Examples include planning, helping to implement, and monitoring instruction of activities like handwriting, cutting, walking, sitting, or wheelchair mo-

bility. They consult with school staff to help the child to participate in, and pay attention to activities.

LIMITATIONS OF SCHOOL OT AND PT SERVICES

School-based OT and PT services for children from age 3 to 21 are defined by law as "related services" and thus must support the specially designed instruction listed on the IFSP or IEP. *Motor delay or medical diagnosis confirmed by evaluation results does not automatically indicate a need for school therapy.* There must also be an adverse impact on the child's performance or access to education. School therapy must deal primarily with the impact the disability has on student function in the educational program.

Related Services are provided only if required to help a child with a disability to benefit from his/her special education program.

OT AND PT SERVICES UNDER SECTION 504

Some students with disabilities may not be in need of special education, but may still need the services of an OT or PT in order to have access to the school and learning materials. For these students, therapists may consult with school staff to 1) evaluate the motor needs of the child, 2) help assure access, and 3) help assure safety of the student.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AND PHYSICAL THERAPY SERVICES IN EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), requires that OT and PT services for children from birth to age 3 be related to the child's *development*. Therefore, the focus is on developmental milestones. More intensive OT and PT Service may be needed by children in this age group recognizing that daily follow-through by family and caregivers is central to support progress. The reason is that a higher level of service at a young age could reduce the level of disability when the child is older. Early Intervention programs are not required to provide all the therapy services a child may need. A referral may be made to the child's doctor to determine the need for other services.

The goal of therapy services for infants and young children is to help families to assist their children to develop functional self-help, play and motor skills. Using activities and hands-on intervention, therapists seek to minimize the effects of the child's disability. Therapists work as part of a team which includes the family, an early childhood specialist and other specialists or professionals determined by the child's individual needs.

For more information, contact your school district or the RSOI website at www.rsoi.org.