

## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY REFERRAL PROCESS

**Preface:** A large number of students referred to Occupational Therapy can be more quickly and effectively assisted by the teacher implementing basic strategies. From reports done in other districts & states, up to 95% of students can become successful in the core curriculum through consistent implementation of the following strategies. The remaining 5% of students who do not progress in response to these strategies may require skilled intervention from an Occupational Therapist to achieve success, and a referral is then appropriate.

### Directions:

Basic Classroom Strategies & Targeted Individual Student Strategies must be implemented and documented **PRIOR** to Therapist Driven intervention.

- Basic Classroom Strategies: Implement a minimum of 2 Basic Classroom Strategies below. **You must document strategies**
- Targeted Individual Student Strategies: implement a minimum of 2 Targeted Individual Student Strategies below to be implemented and documented over a **3-week period**
- Therapist Driven Interventions: If student has **NOT** made adequate improvement over a 3 week period of implementing Basic Classroom Strategies & Targeted Individual Student Strategies suggestions,
  - 1. Complete a Referral Form\* with comprehensive, detailed information and send to OT,
    - Referral form is found under teacher resources tab
  - 2. Send documentation of Basic Classroom Strategies/Targeted Individual Student Strategies attempted and results to SPED teacher
  - 3. Attach sample of typical handwriting

### Basic Classroom Strategies (To be tried before Interventions/Screenings)

- Posture
  - Use appropriate desk height and chair. The desk height would be approximately 2” above the elbows (arms are by the student’s side with elbows slightly bent) when the student is sitting upright. If the student is slumping forward, the desk might be too low; if the child is leaning back with his or her elbows raised up, the desk might be too high.
  - Make sure the student’s feet touch the floor with hips and knees bent at 90 degrees. In order to achieve this, the student may need a smaller (or larger) chair and/or the desk height may need to be adjusted accordingly. (If the student’s feet do not touch the floor, place a block under his/her feet. )
- To improve pencil grip:
  - Have student use short pencils, crayons and chalk to encourage correct pincer position
  - *Try various pencil grips to see if one is comfortable and improves performance*

- Hold on to a small bead
- Paper placement
  - Check the paper position. The paper should be midline, parallel to the student's writing arms. For right-handed students, the paper should be tilted slightly so that the upper right corner is slightly higher. For left-handed children, the upper left corner is slightly higher, which helps them keep their wrist straight rather than hooking the wrist
- Try various lined papers – some students do better with wide paper, some with narrow, college ruled paper
- To help students keep writing within the lines
  - Outline pictures with bright colors or use templates or stencils to help the child remain within the boundaries while coloring.
  - You can place glue around the outline as a boundary (ahead of time so it can dry) for either coloring or cutting.
  - Highlight margins with markers (green for left margin to “go” back to the left and red for right margin to “stop” at the red line).
  - For students who have a hard time staying within the lines spatial difficulties, use lined paper rather than plain paper for writing projects to assist with organization of words on the page.
  - Use an index card or a ruler under the line the student has to write on, having the student move the index card down as he/she writes.
  - If a student has difficulty lining up math problems, use graph paper or turn lined paper sideways so the student can write each number in a column. Graph paper can also be used to help a student with difficulty spacing between words.
- Tape a strip to the student's desk with a model of the manuscript or cursive upper/lowercase alphabet, numbers and/or the student's cursive signature.
- Clear the desk of all clutter.
- Keep worksheets clear and uncluttered, use half worksheets, prepare worksheets with only one problem on a sheet, or have worksheets with fill-in answers only (rather than expecting the student to recopy a math problem, for example).
- Have the student write on strips rather than on a whole piece of paper.
- For students who have difficulty copying from the board, provide a model at their desk, or keep an open desk at the front of the room that they can come up and sit in while copying.

## **Targeted Individual Student Strategies (Appropriate when underlying physiological deficit)**

- Basic dexterity
  - Touch tip of finger to tip of thumb sequentially
  - Rotate pencil in one hand (don't allow use of opposite hand, body, or desk)
  - Pick up cards off table (don't let them bring it to the edge)
  - Play games such as picking up small items with tweezers, coloring, sewing cards, cutting, painting, shaping with clay, etc.
- Hand strength
  - Flour balloon finger exercises
    - Squeeze the ball for a count of three, then relax your grip. Repeat up to twenty times to a point of fatigue. This increases grip strength through the wrist and releases tension.
    - Pinch the ball with the thumb and each finger, one at a time. Then pinch the ball between just the fingers, giving the thumb a rest. Hold each pinch for a count of three and repeat up to twenty times or to the point of fatigue.
    - Roll the ball against a table. Repeat the back and forth motion up to twenty times with each hand. This action engages muscles up the entire arm while providing light massage to the fingers, palm and wrist.
    - Holding the ball with both hands, twist each hand in opposite directions, as if trying to untwist it. Repeat up to twenty times, then reverse the direction of the twist. This engages the whole hand as well as the wrist, once again strengthening while relieving stress.
- Stacking blocks (1" blocks)
- Have the student fold papers (origami is great!). If a student has difficulty folding paper in half, place a colored dot on each corner so the child can match corners.
- Block imitation (copy 3-5 block design)
- Cut out a window in a piece of cardboard and place it over a worksheet (or book) so that only relevant information (or a line at a time) is showing through the window.
- Strategies for letter reversals: verbal cues, such as "c" comes before "d" (make a "c," then draw the line and it becomes a "d"); a lowercase "b" is like a capital "B" but without the top curve; keep a model of commonly reversed letters on the student's desk. Use different colors for the letter or reinforce directionality ("b" & "p" red as loop is on the right – "d" and "q" green because loop is on the left).
- Core strength
  - Animal walking (crab, monkey, bear, etc.)
  - Planking
  - On all fours reaching to do activity
- Slanted surface
  - Providing a slanted surface may help a student sit up straight. You can use a 3" binder on the desk with the wide edge toward the back of the desk (so the binder slants downward toward the student).