

Waiting Well

Information for patients, relatives, and carers

February 2025



Welcome to Children's Occupational Therapy. Occupational Therapy helps children develop the skills they need for daily activities, such as writing, dressing and playing. Our goal is to support your child in areas such as fine and gross motor skills, sensory regulation, and social development.

As Occupational Therapists we work together, with families to ensure, we make a lasting difference in your child's development.

Here are some Children's Occupational Therapy tips, while you wait for your appointment:

Focus on daily living skills:

- **Self-care:** Encourage your child to practice dressing, brushing teeth, and other self-care tasks independently, even if it takes longer or is messier.
- **Eating:** Offer a variety of foods and textures to promote healthy eating habits and develop fine motor skills.
- **Play:** Engage in activities that promote creativity, problem-solving, and social skills, such as building with blocks, playing with playdough, or drawing.

Sensory activities:

- **Sensory bins:** Create bins filled with different materials like rice, beans, or water beads to stimulate the senses of touch and sight.
- **Sensory playdough:** Make playdough with different scents and textures to engage the senses of smell and touch.
- **Outdoor play:** Spend time outdoors to experience different sensory experiences, like feeling grass, sand, or water.

Fine motor skills:

- **Puzzles:** Start with simple puzzles and gradually increase the difficulty as your child develops.
- **Cutting and sticking:** Provide age-appropriate scissors and paper to practice cutting and sticking skills.
- **Threading activities:** Use beads or pasta to practice threading skills, which can help with hand-eye coordination and fine motor control.

Gross motor skills:

- **Obstacle courses:** Set up simple obstacle courses in your home or backyard to encourage crawling, climbing, and balancing.
- **Ball play:** Play catch or kick a ball to develop coordination and gross motor skills.
- **Dance and movement:** Put on music and dance together to promote movement and coordination.

Communication and social skills:

- **Read aloud:** Read books together and discuss the stories to promote language development and imagination.
- **Play pretend:** Engage in imaginative play to develop social skills and creativity.
- **Join playgroups:** Attend playgroups or social activities to encourage interaction with other children.

Additional tips:

- **Observe your child's interests:** Incorporate their interests into activities to make them more engaging.
- **Be patient and positive:** Offer encouragement and support and avoid frustration or criticism.
- **Celebrate small successes:** Acknowledge and praise your child's efforts, no matter how small.

Children's Occupational Therapy

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Remember, these are just suggestions, and you can adapt them to your child's individual needs and abilities. The most important thing is to provide a supportive and stimulating environment for your child to learn and grow.

Helping understand your Childs senses:

Proprioception:

The proprioceptive system is the sensory system in our brain that receives information from our muscles, tendons and joints which then enables us to know what position our body is in without having to look. Some children constantly seek movement or deep pressure, and you may notice that they do this through fidgeting, running, jumping, climbing, pushing up against things, squeezing into small spaces. You can support your child's proprioceptive needs through different types of movement activity. Deep pressure activities will be calming, and movement activities are likely to be alerting.

Vestibular:

The vestibular system is the sensory system that receives information about our movements in space from our inner ears. It makes us aware of which way is 'up'. It also has a big impact on how awake and alert we are, and vestibular input can assist the child to organise themselves. Slow, linear movements, backwards and forwards are organising and calming particularly when combined with proprioceptive input. Fast, irregular spinning movements are alerting and can be really fun and exciting for your children to engage in - but it's important to pick the right time and environment to be doing these in i.e., not right before sleep or focused activity but they might be ok during free play/ soft play.

Tactile:

We all experience touch all the time, whether it be the touch of the clothes we are wearing, the touch of the chair we are sitting on or the touch we experience when someone cuddles us. Touch is important for social development. It also helps us to assess the environment we are in, for example, determining whether an object hot or cold and reacting accordingly. It also allows us to feel pain.

The skin is the biggest and most sensitive organ of the body and being under or over-sensitive to touch is one of the most common sensory difficulties. The ability to process tactile input is very important as it enables children to be able to regulate their behaviour, maintain attention and concentration so that they can play and learn, and engage and participate in functional activities and tasks.

Olfactory:

The sense of smell is also known as the olfactory system. It is the most sensitive of our senses and helps us to identify an array of different aromas in the atmosphere. Our sense of smell is strongly linked with our sense of taste and although we are able to smell when born, the ability to distinguish between a pleasant and unpleasant odour is not immediate and our response to aromas must be learnt.

Gustatory:

Taste is also known as the gustatory system. This system allows us to recognise five basic taste sensations: sweet, bitter, salty, sour and savoury. Our sense of taste gives us the ability to respond to food that provides us with the nutrients our bodies need to survive. The sense of taste and smell work together to detect chemicals in the air and in food. This detection allows us to determine if a food, a drink or something in the environment is safe or not. Our taste buds are located all over our mouth but are predominantly on the tongue.

Auditory:

Auditory processing is all about how the brain recognises and makes sense of sound. Sounds consist of loudness, pitch, how long the sound lasts and where it is coming from. Our brain takes all this sound in automatically, processes the information and then responds appropriately to it.

Visual:

The visual system is how we receive and process sensory information through our eyes. Our eyes and brain work together to communicate and interpret what we see in our physical surroundings. Our brain identifies the object and gives it meaning. Our visual system allows us to create a memory of the image and gives the context within our environment.

Interception:

Our interceptive system is responsible for understanding and feeling what is going on inside our bodies. Sensations such as hunger, thirst, bathroom needs, heart rate, breathing rate, temperature, and emotional regulation are all part of this system. Gradually, children learn to recognise different internal feelings in their body. As a result, they begin to develop an internal literacy so that they can respond to particular feelings in adaptive ways, for example if they feel cold, they know to put on warm clothing or get a blanket. Our interceptive system helps us to regulate our emotional self so that if our feelings become heightened, we can work out a way back to an emotionally calm, stable state.

Developmental Co-ordination Disorder

What is DCD?

DCD stands for Developmental Co-ordination Disorder. It is generally understood as an impairment or immaturity relating to organisation skills. Children with these difficulties often find day to day tasks a lot more challenging and tiring than their peers. They may experience difficulties with some of the following activities:

- Is late in reaching milestones e.g., rolling over, sitting, standing, walking, and speaking.
- May not be able to run, hop, jump, or catch or kick a ball although their peers can do so.
- Has difficulty in keeping friends; or judging how to behave in company.
- Has little understanding of concepts such as 'in', 'on', 'in front of' etc.
- Has difficulty in walking up and down stairs.
- Poor at dressing.
- Appears not to be able to learn anything instinctively but must be taught skills.
- Falls over frequently.
- Poor pencil grip.
- Often anxious and easily distracted.
- Does badly in class but significantly better on a one-to-one basis.
- May have trouble with maths and writing structured stories.
- Experiences great difficulty in copying from the blackboard.
- Writes laboriously and immaturely.
- Unable to remember and /or follow instructions.
- Is generally poorly organised.

Taken from Dyspraxia Foundation

What can I do to help?

There are lots of things that you can do to assist and help a child with DCD. Many tasks may need repeating, to give the child chance to process the motor movement and secure it away. This is why it often takes a child with DCD longer to learn tasks, or achieve milestones in relation to their peers. Children with DCD also often have extremely low self-esteem, and this can become more apparent the older they become, and the more aware they are of the differences between themselves and children of their own age. The main thing is constant encouragement and praise, below we will give you some advice on things to do both at home and at school.

Getting dressed and eating:

You may find day to day tasks that others find easy, prove to be quite challenging for a DCD child. We have tried to take a general look at some of these difficulties,

Getting Dressed:

Initially try laying out the items your child will need in the order they will put them on. They may need physical help at first, with verbal prompts, then reduce this to just verbal prompts. Try to give the child chance to think things through. It can be frustrating when they have put their t-shirt on backwards for the tenth time, but all of these mistakes are helping to get it right in the long run. If after lots of practice you find that some fastenings are still challenging, consider altering them. E.G. Place Velcro on the inside of a shirt behind the top button, then it looks like it has been fastened by a button, but the child just has to use the Velcro instead.

Having Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner:

Try to make sure a child with DCD sits down to eat. This gives them a much better chance of understanding where their body is, and then being able to concentrate on the other tasks needed to eat. If their feet don't touch the floor place something underneath their feet to give them extra support. This could be a stool, cardboard box, a pile of books etc. Using a damp tea towel under their plate/ bowl will help to stop it sliding around the table.

Getting organised:

Getting Organised Leaving shoes and coats in the same place, makes it much easier to remember where to find them. Possibly have an individual peg where everything they need will be found e.g., school bag, coat, jumper, hat, scarf etc.

Sticky notes placed at eye level in key areas are helpful reminders. If you are giving instructions to gather items, try to break these down into smaller lists. So instead of, 'Can you get your shoes, jumper and coat from upstairs?' Just ask for one item at a time. Or get the child to repeat what you have asked them for, this gives them chance to process the instructions and re-affirm what they need.

Getting ready for school:

The move into school is always daunting, but at primary school, particularly the early years of primary, there tends to be more parental involvement e.g., parents taking children into class and helping them get ready for the day. As your child gets older and seeks a little more independence it can be stressful for both parents and children to remember everything and not worry. Here are some top tips to try:

1. Try to label everything. This could be in a distinctive colour or with a particular picture that the child recognises easily.
2. Have a check list either on a tag on the child's bag, or in their drawer with a list of what they need to bring home.
3. For secondary school try colour coding things, e.g., English books are red etc. or on a blue day I need my P.E kit.
4. Recording homework - ask the child's teacher if they can print out what the homework is or check the child has copied it down correctly.
5. Try to make it as fun as possible, organisation doesn't need to be a chore.

General classroom ideas:

Taking a general look at the most common classroom problems we are asked.

- **Fidgety Children** - If you can allow a child to hold a fidget toy this may help, it may not appear that they are listening at times but by using the fidget toy it often helps them attend to task.
- **Wobble Cushions** - These can also help sometimes, they can be used on the classroom chair, or sometimes when the child is sat on the carpet at circle time. Many schools now own a few of these and it is worth trying one. They can come in a round cushion shape or a wedge shape.
- **Writing with wrist in the air** - Try using a writing slope to see if this helps the child's wrist to come back down onto the slope. Again, many schools own slopes, otherwise try a large empty lever arch file.
- **Sitting position** - The ideal sitting position would be hips, knees, and ankles all at 90°. The other important thing to think about would be where a child is sitting, can they easily see the board, and are they likely to be knocked where they sit? E.g. in front of drawers or just inside the entrance to the classroom.

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have.

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

If you have any suggestions or comments about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the PALS team on **0191 445 6129** (09.00 – 17.00, Monday to Friday).

You can also email PALS at **ghnt.pals.service@nhs.net**

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Chief Executive,
Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust,
Trust Headquarters,
Queen Elizabeth Hospital,
Sheriff Hill,
Gateshead,
NE9 6SX

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In order to assist us to improve the services available, your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews and Statistics.

Further information is available via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website ([Privacy - QE Gateshead](#)) or by contacting the Data Protection Officer by telephone on 0191 445 8418 or by email ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net.

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