

A guide for parents and Carers

What Happens in an Occupational Therapy Assessment?

If your child finds everyday tasks challenging – like getting dressed, writing clearly, using cutlery, or staying focused – an occupational therapy (OT) assessment can help identify what's going on and how to support them.

An occupational therapist works with children and young people to help them do the things they need and want to do in daily life – at home, at school, and in the community.

Who Carries Out the Assessment?

A qualified Occupational Therapist (OT) will complete the assessment. OTs work with children who have:

- Difficulties with fine motor skills (e.g. writing, buttoning shirts)
- Problems with gross motor skills (e.g. balance, coordination)
- Delays in self-care skills (e.g. dressing, eating independently)
- Sensory processing differences (e.g. oversensitive to sound or touch)
- Challenges with focus, attention, or organising themselves
- Difficulties linked to conditions like autism, dyspraxia, ADHD, or developmental delays

What Happens in the OT Assessment?

An OT assessment helps build a full picture of your child's abilities, needs, and how they manage daily tasks.

It usually includes:

1. Information Gathering

The OT will talk with you and (where appropriate) your child to gather background information, such as:

- Developmental history
- Medical or educational reports
- What your child finds easy or difficult
- Any concerns from school or nursery

They may also ask for information from teachers, SENCOs, or other professionals.

2. Observation of Functional Tasks

The OT will observe how your child carries out everyday activities such as:

- Writing or drawing
- Using scissors or cutlery
- Getting dressed
- Balancing, climbing, or catching a ball
- Moving around the room or playground
- Staying seated or switching attention between tasks

For younger children, this might involve play-based observation; for older children, it may include more structured tasks.

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3. Standardised Tests and Checklists

To better understand your child's needs, the OT may use formal and informal assessments, including:

Fine Motor Skills Tests

- Pencil grip, handwriting, drawing shapes or letters
- Picking up small objects (e.g. beads, buttons)
- Using tools like scissors or zips

Gross Motor Skills Tests

- Running, hopping, balance and coordination
- Ball skills, core strength, posture

Visual Perception & Processing

- Copying patterns
- Tracking objects visually
- Sorting or matching shapes and letters

Sensory Processing Screening

- Responses to noise, light, textures, or movement
- Sensitivity to clothing or food textures
- Seeking or avoiding sensory input (e.g. spinning, crashing, chewing)

Daily Living Skills (Self-Care)

- Washing hands, brushing teeth
- Dressing, eating, toileting
- Organising belongings, using routines

Regulation and Attention

- Focus, switching tasks, staying calm
- Managing frustration or sensory overload

4. What Happens After the Assessment?

The OT will provide:
A Written Report

This may include:

- An overview of your child's strengths and difficulties
- Descriptions of how your child performs certain tasks
- Observations about sensory needs or motor skills
- Any diagnoses or contributing factors (if applicable)

Clear Recommendations

You'll get practical, tailored advice, which may include:

- Fine motor or sensory strategies
- Adaptations in the classroom or home
- Exercises or play-based activities
- Special equipment (e.g. pencil grips, wobble cushions)
- Visual supports or regulation tools
- Advice for teachers and SEND staff

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Why Is an OT Assessment helpful?

An OT assessment helps answer questions like:

- Why does my child struggle with writing, dressing, or feeding?
- Why do they avoid certain textures or become overwhelmed easily?
- What is affecting their attention, posture, or coordination?
- What support will help them feel more confident and independent?

It also helps schools and families better understand the child's needs and put the right support in place – whether through an Individual Support Plan, EHCP, or regular OT sessions.

Final thoughts

Every child develops at their own pace. If daily tasks are harder than expected for your child, an OT assessment can be a positive and empowering step. It helps identify hidden needs and gives you the tools and strategies to support your child at home and in school – helping them become more confident, capable, and independent.