

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

in Alberta Schools

SAOT 
Society of Alberta Occupational Therapists



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OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS

This package has been developed to help raise awareness of the role of occupational therapy (OT) in schools. Our goal is to help school boards, superintendents, principals, administrators and teachers understand the full value that OT brings to Alberta students and families.

What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational Therapists (OTs) focus on function and promoting independence. We work with people of all ages to develop skills, improve physical, cognitive, and emotional abilities, adapt their environment, and/or change the way they do activities.

About Occupational Therapists

OTs are university educated, health care professionals that are medically trained to understand the limitations of a disability or injury, along with the psychosocial and environmental factors that affect a person's functioning. We are regulated health care professionals registered with the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists (ACOT).

Occupational Therapy for Alberta Students

We support all children to be independent, and we work alongside teachers and other school staff in an inclusive school environment to deliver evidence-based strategies with proven outcomes. In schools, OTs focus on academics, play and leisure, social participation, self-care skills (ADLs or Activities of Daily Living), and transition/ work abilities.

There are many ways that OTs can be involved in helping students succeed at school:

- Adapt tasks, modify the environment, and identify strategies to support daily functioning in the classroom;
- Develop life skills and build on the child's strengths through play or targeted interventions that address the physical, cognitive, psychosocial, and sensory challenges that a student may have; and
- Collaborate with educators, family and other professionals to meet the goals/needs of the child and their support system.



***Our scope of practice is broad,
offering tremendous value to
students, caregivers and the
school team!***

THE OT ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS

Mental health plays a vital role in a student's ability to be successful at school. Occupational therapy services can help children develop productive habits and routines that support their physical, intellectual, and emotional health and growth. When children's abilities are well matched with the demands of an activity and the environment where they live, learn, and play, they can better cope with challenges and succeed in a variety of school activities.

Occupational therapists are trained in mental health assessments and interventions. As an important part of the school's mental health team, we can enhance student success, promote positive mental health and wellbeing for the students. We work collaboratively with psychologists, social workers, and mental health workers in partnership with educators and families.

There are a number of ways that OTs promote mental health in the classroom:

- **Promote mental health for all:**
 - Introduce recess activities that promote collaborative play and anti-bullying;
 - Provide coaching strategies to support positive self-esteem;
 - Modify classrooms and common areas to promote self-regulation skills;
 - Provide teachers with resources and education to support students with mental health needs.
- **Address the needs of students who could develop mental health challenges:**
 - Facilitate social participation during recess and lunch;
 - Analyze the cognitive demands of school tasks and recommend adaptations;
 - Provide small group activities to teach adaptation to stressors.
- **Create comprehensive programs for students experiencing challenges with their mental health:**
 - Provide comprehensive assessments;
 - Introduce activity-based intervention that considers the student's interests;
 - Integrate mental health therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy; and
 - Educate and support caregivers with interventions for students experiencing mental health challenges.



Occupational Therapy for Children and Adolescents

Working together for growth and development



29%
of Alberta OTs provide
services to
children, adolescents
and families



>1/5
of Albertan Children
have a diagnosed
disability by the time
they are in kindergarten




70%
of mental health
challenges are
onset in childhood
or adolescence



1 in 50
children are
diagnosed with Autism
Spectrum Disorder

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WE ARE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

Supporting
mental health
within
Alberta schools



HOW OTs HELP

- Adapting environments, routines and activities to promote learning.
- Promoting mental wellness through meaningful activities.
- Working with staff and caregivers to identify students with mental health concerns.
- Developing social skills, emotional learning and regulation



OVER

80%

of Canadian children
have untreated
mental health needs



The daily life of

1.2 MILLION

Canadian children
is impacted by their
mental health