

What should my child be doing at the pre-k and kindergarten age level?

**An occupational therapy in-service for SWS parents
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What is Occupational Therapy?

Many people think the word “occupation” is a work-related term; however, an occupation can be anything someone does to occupy his or her time in every day life. Groups of activities constitute an occupation. For example, *work, leisure/play, and self-care* are general occupations. Within each of these are components of one or more activities. *Self-care* includes many activities of daily living such as brushing your teeth, bathing, eating, and dressing. *Leisure/play* can involve reading, writing, teaching, or typing. Activities are the building blocks or components of human occupation.

“Occupational therapy is a health profession concerned with improving a person’s occupational performance. In a pediatric setting, the occupational therapist deals with children whose occupations are usually play, preschoolers, or students” (A Parent’s Guide to Understanding Sensory Integration, 1986).

“Occupational therapists use a knowledge base of neurology, anatomy, physiology, kinesiology (the study of muscles), child development, psychology, psychosocial development, activity analysis, and therapeutic techniques. They are trained to treat clients holistically, addressing their cognitive, emotional, and physical needs through functional, activity-based treatment. When working in pediatrics occupational therapists select activities that are of interest and have meaning for children, and that also meet therapeutic goals” (The *Alert Program for Self Regulation, How does your engine run?*, 1992).

Possible reasons for referral to OT for a preschool or kindergarten age child:

Visual motor skills – difficulty coordinating hand movements/skills using the eyes, copying shapes, connecting dots, mazes, difficulty cutting on a line, writing

Visual perceptual skills – difficulty labeling letters, numbers, shapes, difficulty putting a puzzle together, can’t locate objects in a distracting background, matching

Postural control – sits in a slouched manner at table, props head up with hand while sitting, fidgets constantly in chair, relies on railing to climb stairs, frequently bumps into people objects, props self up against people or objects, poor endurance

Daily living/self-help skills – unusually messy when eating lunch, difficulty manipulating clothing fasteners or pulling pants up/down when using toilet, difficulty turning faucet or water fountain on, washing hands, difficulty opening food packages

General gross motor skills – difficulty maintaining balance when standing on one foot, difficulty on playground equipment, unable to hop, jump, skip, gallop, or walk on a line, appears awkward when running

In-hand manipulation/fine motor skills – drops or has poor control of small objects (pegs, beads, coins), difficulty using both hands at the same time or always uses one hand, hand dominance confusion, difficulty grasping pencil, marker, crayon

Psychosocial skills – stops and starts tasks with an adverse reaction, becomes frustrated or upset easily, has difficulty making friends, has low self-esteem

Attention – doesn't respond to his/her name, looks "spaced out", easily distracted, fidgets often, misses verbal directions or needs directions repeated, impulsive

Play skills – difficulty with sharing, becomes upset when losing a game, difficulty following rules, tends to play alone rather than with peers

Milestones for Motor Skills

Age 4:

Gross Motor

- runs around obstacles
- walks on a line
- balances on one foot for 5 to 10 seconds
- hops on one foot
- rides a tricycle independently, pedals around obstacles and makes U turns
- uses the slide
- jumps over objects with a two-footed takeoff and landing without falling
- throws a ball overhead
- catches a bounced ball thrown from 3 feet away
- climbs on a jungle gym without help
- alternates feet going up and down stairs
- can perform a "summersault" or forward roll without turning to the side
- can gallop 10 feet, beginning to learn to skip
- stands on tiptoes for 5 seconds without moving

Fine Motor & Visual Motor

- builds a tower of 9 blocks (small)
- can copy simple block structures such as a train, steps, pyramid from model
- inserts pegs in a peg board
- copies a circle and a square from a model
- imitates a cross after a demonstration
- manipulates clay by rolling into a ball, snake, pressing into a cookie
- cuts out a big circle with scissors
- connects a series of dots to form simple drawings such as lines, circles, squares
- draws a person with at least 5 different body parts

- grasps a marker between thumb and pad of index finger with marker resting on first joint of middle finger (known as tripod)
- touches each finger to thumb in sequence
- can fold paper in half lengthwise
- colors between vertical lines

Self Help

- consistently uses a fork and a spoon and cuts easy foods with a knife
- dresses and undresses without much help as requested
- buttons/unbuttons large buttons
- can unzip independently and zips with initial help to insert zipper unto tab
- removes and puts on shoes independently, help for tying
- spreads butter with a knife
- washes hands independently
- blows nose when reminded
- uses toilet independently

Age 5:

Gross Motor

- can skip 10 feet
- can hop a distance of 20 feet without falling
- bounces and catches a small ball
- can run lightly on toes
- can walk across a balance beam
- can jump rope
- can use skates
- can kick a ball using opposing arm and leg movements
- performs 5 sit-ups

Fine Motor & Visual Motor

- folds paper in half twice with edges parallel
- cuts out simple shapes
- copies a triangle and can trace a diamond
- copies first name in either upper or lower case
- prints numbers 1 to 5
- colors within the lines
- consistently uses a tripod grasp
- hand dominance is well established
- pastes and glues appropriately
- draws a person with 6 or more different body parts
- connects two dots with a straight line that does not deviate more than ¼ inch

Self Help

- can tie shoes
- brushes or combs own hair well
- cuts most foods with a knife
- dresses self completely
- can snap/unsnap, button/unbutton smaller buttons
- brushes teeth independently

Everyday common household objects can be used to help sensory motor skills. You are probably using some of these familiar objects without even realizing their benefits:

- Spray bottles – squeeze with the hand to develop hand strength and arches, use two bottles and alternate squeezing between the left and right hands
- Chopsticks, tongs and tweezers – pick up tiny objects to promote the development of a tripod grasp on writing/drawing tools
- Spoons – transport and balance objects such as plastic Easter eggs to develop control and the ability to grade movement with the arms
- Flashlights – develop ocular motor skills (eye movements) by drawing letters on a wall, play flashlight tag by chasing someone else’s light
- Sponges – cut into tiny pieces, dip in water, and trace letters on a chalk board to erase, strengthen hand muscles by squeezing water out of large sponges
- Shaving cream – spread out on a table and draw pictures, letters, and numbers, see how long a child can go without requesting to wash or wipe his/her hands
- Clothespins – clip socks, Pokemon cards, drawings, or other small objects of interest to a child on a string tied between two chairs to develop hand strength
- Egg beater (the manual kind) – to develop coordination, use one hand to hold and the other to turn the crank, put in a bowl with water and dish soap to make bubbles, use it in a bath tub, add food coloring to make a bubble potion
- Garlic press – put Play Doh inside and squeeze with both hands to develop hand strength
- Straws – to develop ocular motor skills, blow through straw to move a cotton ball across the floor (make it a race between two people), play soccer on a table using a

ball of paper (crinkle it into a tight ball) set up a goal at each end and try to score against your opponent

- Eye dropper – to develop graded control within the hand, put water and food coloring in different containers, use dropper to put a drop at a time on a piece of paper towel to make a tie dye design
- Nuts and bolts – to develop bilateral skills with the hands, screw nuts and bolts together, try to see how fast the child can do it
- Bubble Volcano – to develop ocular motor skills and finger isolation, put water and a few drops of dish detergent in a large bowl, blow through a straw to create a large mound of bubbles, point one finger to pop the bubbles one at a time