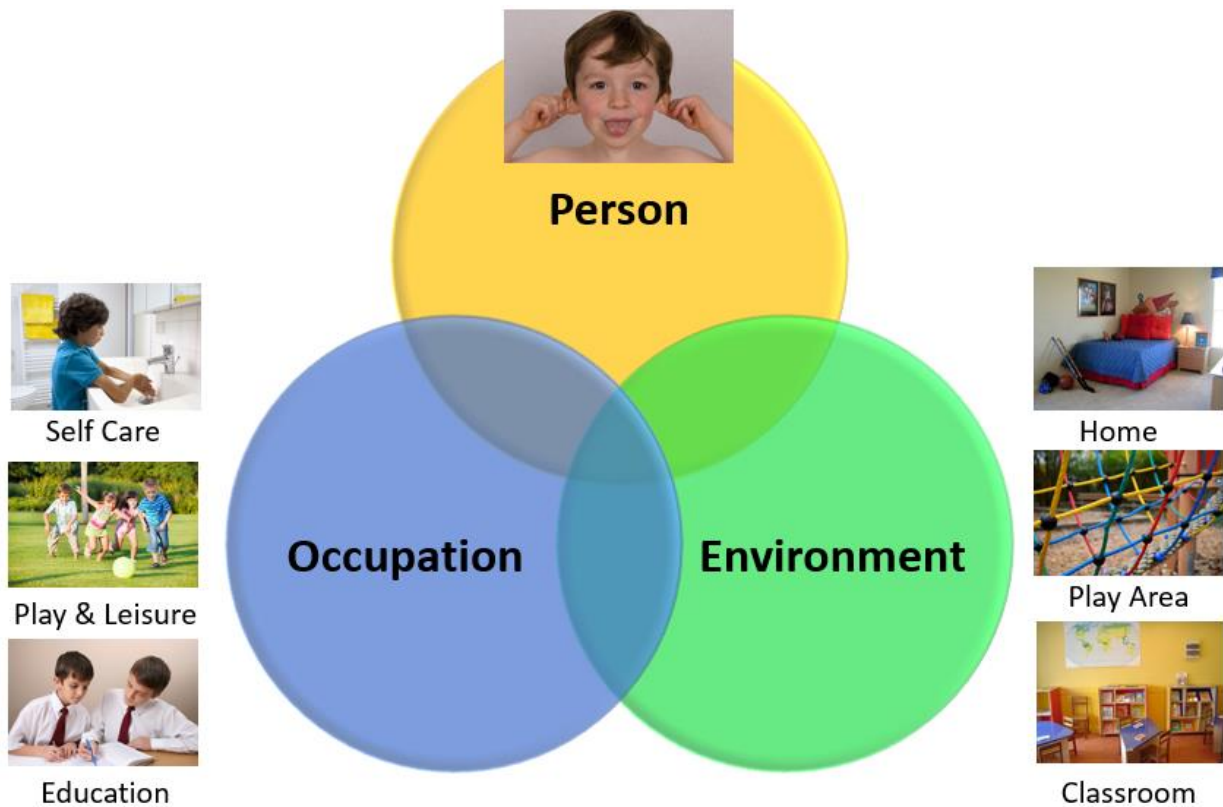


**GENERAL OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY HINTS AND TIPS**

Occupational Therapy believe that joining in (participating in) every day activities (occupations) improves wellbeing. Taking part in occupations helps you to live a safe, healthy and happy life.

We understand that there is a connection between '**the person**', '**the occupation**' and '**the environment**' and that by making changes to any of these areas you can improve participation and wellbeing.

No one will ever learn any new skills if they do not participate and practice. Sometimes you need to have a go and make mistakes so that you can learn. Occupational therapy support children/young people to participate in everyday activities from an early age to give them the best chance of reaching their potential and becoming independent adults.



**Person**

**We are all Individuals**

We all have our own beliefs, motivators, learning styles, strengths/resilience and vulnerabilities. These can all impact on participation and wellbeing.



## Motivation and Goal Setting

Everyone has their own likes and dislikes. What motivates them to persevere with an activity when it is challenging is different for each individual. For most children play is motivating and occupational therapists use play activities to assess and treat children.

Goal setting is an important part of all Health Professional's roles. Anyone who works with children and young people need to take into consideration the child/young person's priorities and motivators as well as those of their family and the other professionals who make up the team around the child.

Goal setting also helps us to identify when therapy should end. Goal setting can help you to empower your child/young person to make changes in their life.

Talking about what is important to you both and agreeing on a shared goal ensures you are both motivated to put in the work required to make the changes needed.

You can use reward charts and keep videos and photos of before and after working on the goal to keep your child motivated. Tell other adults who your child respects so that they can support you both.

## Learning Styles

Everybody learns in different ways. There are three main ways of learning: doing (kinaesthetic), watching (visual), and listening (auditory). Everyone has their own preference of how they learn best and you and your child may vary in these preferences. You may need to help your child in different ways by showing, telling or physically doing with your child.

See it  
Visual 

Hear it/Say it  
Auditory 

Do it  
Kinesthetic 

Some people need a combination of information to learn best and others cannot cope with a combination of information. Experiment with each of these learning styles and find what suits your child best. Remember that some children cannot listen and look at the same time so you might need to show your child and then tell your child rather than showing and telling at the same time.

## Occupation

### Participation and Practice

No one will ever learn any new skills if they do not participate and practice. Sometimes you need to have a go and make mistakes so that you can learn. It is important that children and young people are supported to join in with everyday activities from an early age to give them the best chance of reaching their potential and becoming independent adults.



Some children/young people will be dependent on others for some or all of their occupations and practice will not help them to develop skills. Participation is also important for these children/young people as being involved in their own care to best of their abilities can have a huge impact on their well-being.

## Finding the 'Just Right' Challenge

There are a number of ways that you can think about making changes to the occupation or task. Occupational therapists call these changes grading and activity analysis.

Think about when you are trying to learn a new skill. If the task is too easy it doesn't pose a challenge and you get bored quickly. If the task is too challenging then you become frustrated and may give up.



The same is true for children. We need to give each child the 'just right' challenge, not too easy or too hard. Both the principles below can help you to get the challenge 'just right' for your child. You can also make the activity easier or harder. Occupational therapists call this grading.

## Breaking Down a Task into Manageable Chunks

When teaching your child a new skill (e.g. using a fork, tying their laces, making a cup of tea, skipping with a rope, using scissors etc.) it helps to break the activity down into manageable chunks. You can then teach one chunk at a time, make up a visual aid using photographs or symbols or make a sequence checklist depending on what suits your child, or use adaptive equipment to help with a specific step. You can also look at each of the steps in turn to identify where things are going wrong for your child/young person.

Think about making a cup of tea, this activity can be broken down into lots of different steps. The steps may vary given the environment, what order you like to do things in (milk first or last?) but generally they remain the same. Once you have learned the key components of a task, you then learn how to do the task in different environments.

Let's break making a cup of tea down into steps.

1. Gather what you need - cup, tea pot, kettle, tea bag, milk, sugar, teaspoon (this list will be different depending on how you take your tea and what resources you have access to).
2. Fill the kettle.
3. Boil the water - again this might be different depending on how your kettle works, whether or not your kettle stays plugged in etc.
4. Place the tea bag in the mug/teapot.
5. Pour hot water.
6. Remove tea bag.
7. Add milk and sugar to taste.
8. Enjoy cuppa!



Here are some examples of how you can use these steps to help your child to learn a new skills:

- **Visual Aids**

Use photos or symbols to aid learning.

- Make a slide show/ flip book/ photo album on a phone or tablet with photos or symbols of the different steps.
- Make a visual list of all the items required for the task.



- **Checklists**

Use checklists as reminders of the sequence of steps.

These could be written lists with boxes to tick when steps are completed. Or you could combine the checklist with photos or symbols.



- **Step by Step**

Focus on teaching one step at a time.

- You can use chaining - teaching one step at a time in order. You can start with either the first step and work towards the last step (forward chaining) or start with the last step and work towards the first step (backward chaining).
- By looking at each step in the task you can work out where things are going wrong. You and your child can then focus on problem solving around that step.

- **Adaptive Equipment**

Use adaptive/alternative equipment for the different steps.

In the making tea example you could use:

- A jug to fill the kettle if holding the kettle is too difficult.
- A kettle tipper or a flask with just enough water if lifting and pouring from the kettle is difficult.
- A tea bag squeezer.
- A liquid level indicator if knowing when to stop pouring is difficult.



## Giving Help

There are different methods you can use to help your child to learn.

You can **show** your child, do the activity next to them or watch videos of the task. The child is watching.

You can **tell** your child, talk your child through each step of the process. The child is listening.

You can **do** the task with your child by putting your hands over theirs and doing the task. The child is doing.  
Try out different ways of helping until you find what suits your child. You can use each of these ways individually or any combination depending on what suits your child. For a lot of children it can be difficult to watch and listen at the same time. So try each way individually before you try using combinations. Once you find what works for your child stick with this approach.

Show it



Visual

Say it



Auditory

Do it



Kinesthetic

## Environment

The environment can impact on participation and well-being. To support participation in occupation we can make changes to the environment.



We can think of the environment in a variety of ways:

**Physical** - Occupational Therapists are skilled in looking at the physical environment and suggesting changes which can improve participation and well-being.

We can assess the home environment and make recommendations in relation to adaptive equipment which may be beneficial. We might suggest that your child/young person completes a task in a different room or position.

**Sensory** - The sensory environment can impact on a child/young person's participation and well-being.

Occupational Therapists can help you think about the sensory environment in relation to activities of daily living and make some suggestions about how you can modify the sensory environment to help your child to participate more.

**Social/Cultural** - Occupational Therapists think about the social and cultural environment which children are part of and how these environments may be helping them to succeed. An Occupational Therapist will make sure that any recommendations are relevant to the child and those around them.