

## Children's Occupational Therapy Service

# Physical Disability Pathway



### COORDINATION

Your child may be referred to Occupational Therapy because they have difficulties with their motor co-ordination skills. If these difficulties are having an impact on your child's self-care skills, leisure activities, and/ or their skills required to support their learning at school they may be seen through the Co-ordination Matters Pathway.

#### Why does co-ordination matter?

It is important to identify when children have co-ordination difficulties which are significantly impacting on their life skills and to ensure that appropriate support and structures are in place to promote their skills. This is important for their social and emotional wellbeing as well as their independence and educational development.

#### What should I expect?

Before the assessment you and the school may be requested to complete skills questionnaires which provide us with more information about your child's difficulties. Please complete these as fully as possible.

The assessment lasts 60-90 minutes and will include a discussion with you and your child about what is important to you both. We will also explore in more detail any specific areas of difficulty you have identified. There will be a number of activities for your child to do which provide us with information about their motor and functional skills. Most children find these activities enjoyable and fun. We will also consider perceptual, sensory and cognitive skills if these are having an impact on your child's motor performance.

#### What happens after the assessment?

Following the assessment the therapist will discuss the next steps for your child.

This may include:

Advice regarding strategies and/or activities to develop your child's skills

Invitation to a group for your child to work towards their goals within a small group of children.

Invitation to a one-off 'task' session to work on specific areas of difficulty.

Invitation to a parent education workshop

Referral on to another service

Follow up therapy may be carried out by a therapy support worker. The therapist will discuss any plan with you in more detail.

### Good Sitting

- Tummy away from table
- Back leaning slightly forward
- Bent elbows 5cm above table
- Chair well under the table
- Bottom well back into the chair
- Feet flat on the floor
- Thighs fully supported and knees bent at 90 degrees



A Good sitting position is important when doing functional activities.

The child's feet should touch the floor. For this purpose the height of the furniture may need to be adjusted accordingly or a foot box needs to be placed under the child's feet.

Sitting upright in front of the desk ensures an optimum distance between desk and hand; this way the child monitor and control their activities; any other sitting position may impair the child's function.

## Handwriting

If you believe that your child is having difficulty producing good quality handwriting please use the following information and links to find strategies and advice that may be useful.

There are many factors that can affect your child's ability to produce good quality handwriting.

**POSTURE** – Good handwriting begins at the **HIPS**

**Chair too high** - The child's feet should be supported so that they are not hanging. Try a non-slip foot box or chair with adjustable foot rests.

**Chair too low** – the knees are then too high or the legs have to wrap around the legs of the chair which pulls the child bottom forwards in the chair. Please ensure that their feet are flat on the ground or a box.

**Table too high** – this will prevent free movement of the arms. The table should be at bent elbow (waist) level.

**Head too close to table** – If your child tends to hold his/her face very close to the table and paper when writing please consider having their eyes checked for short sightedness. If this is not the reason try a sloped writing board or a lever arch file. A wedge shaped cushion on their seat will also encourage them to sit more upright.

If leaning over the table lots they may have some reduced muscle strength around their middle/core and become tired during prolonged sitting/writing so please ensure that their body is supported as described above with feet on the floor or box and table at elbow height. Also encourage sports (if they are safe to do so) that are good for their core strength for example yoga/gymnastics/horse-riding/swimming .

If sat with the correct support from their chair and table they should be able to move their arm freely and be able to form a 'Shoulder Triangle' shape with their shoulder elbow and hand as the three corners. Their wrist should be freely able to move in all directions.



### **PEN/PENCIL GRASP**

The paper should be tilted to the right if right handed and to the left if left handed so that they can write in straight lines. If they often forget to do this try using tape at the top of the paper to stick it into the right position.



If your child has an unusual pencil/pen grasp they may benefit from any of the pencil/pen grips that can be bought and finding the right grip is often a case of trial and error.

If they are putting lots of pressure through the pencil/pen a Light Up pen may help. This will flash a light from the top when too much pressure is applied and encourage your child to relax their finger grasp.

If too little pressure is being used to support and move the pencil/pen your child may benefit from finger exercises with therapeutic putty / stiff play dough before doing a written or drawing activity. These might include rolling the putty into one large ball or lots of smaller balls; squashing the putty with one finger at a time; and stretching a loop of putty between two fingers until all fingers have had a try.

Please see leaflets on website for further information:

- Let me get ready for handwriting
- help with handwriting
- Pencil grips

## **Visual Perception**

### **What is visual Perception?**

This is the process of the brain interpreting the pictures it receives from the eyes. This is different from the ability of the eyes to see or the ability of the nerves to transport that information from the eyes to the brain. When the brain receives the visual images it needs to interpret these to make sense of what the eyes have seen.

### **What does it affect?**

It can affect everything where sight is the main piece of information. This ranges from reading, writing, finding items like scissors, copying from the blackboard to self care skills such as finding clothes onto to more general skills such as moving around rooms and negotiating obstacles. Having a problem in this area does not necessarily mean that a person will not learn these skills, more that it is harder for them to learn, it may take longer and there may be more mistakes or frustration.

### **What can be done?**

Practicing skills can be helpful as well as identifying specific areas of visual perception which are affected. There are many websites and resources available to provide opportunities to work on visual perception skills.

Occupational Therapy can offer more in depth assessments in this area and a more child specific approach to activities. Please see our leaflet for further information

Please see leaflets on website for further information:

- What is visual perception
- What are visual memory skills