

OT/PT CONCERNS AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

A. Handwriting Concerns:

- Writes with too much pencil pressure, too little pressure
- Irregular sequencing of strokes when forming letters
- Poor pencil grasp
- Problems with spacing, alignment and sizing of letters/words
- Slumped posture; holds head close to paper
- Lack of established hand dominance; left-handed writer

Intervention Strategies to Try:

- Write letters with a highlighter for student to trace
- Use a start dot on letters/numbers for correct sequencing of strokes
- Use pencil grips, larger pencils, or markers for writing
- Hand warm-up and strengthening exercises
- Do not require writing on lines if not ready for lines
- For older students, use an AlphaSmart or computer, reduce amount of work
- Use adapted paper with middle guideline (size of notebook paper) with spaces between lines
- Positioning: Desk at the correct height, feet touching the floor
- Paper positioned at the correct angle with non-writing hand stabilizing paper
- **Refer to “Handwriting and Beyond” manual**

B. Vision/Visual Perceptual Concerns:

- Difficulty copying from board, paper copy or overhead
- Reversal of letters or numbers after 7 years old
- Unusual eye movements; difficulty with eye tracking
- Difficulty discriminating, colors, shapes, doing puzzles
- Difficulty writing on lines, poor alignment
- Difficulty copying designs, numbers, letters
- Difficulty with eye hand eye foot coordination
- Student wears glasses

Vision/Visual Perceptual Strategies:

- Number/letter strip on desk
- Slant board for better visual angle of paper
- Cue card on desk with frequently reversed letters/numbers
- Paper copy of overheads; place student in front of class for best view of overhead
- Visual cues (use highlighter) for tracing letters, accentuating middle guideline
- Position student in front of the class with straight on view of white board
- **Refer to “Handwriting and Beyond” manual**

C. Fine Motor/Self Care Concerns:

- Difficulty with zipping, tying shoes, snapping coat on/off
- Difficulty managing utensils, food packages, feeding self
- Messy eater, difficulty swallowing, drinking from a straw
- Needs assistance with toileting
- Difficulty using both hands together
- Lack of well established hand dominance after 6 years of age
- Difficulty cutting
- Difficulty coloring or drawing

Fine Motor/Self Care Strategies:

- Set up a self-care station in your classroom with shoes, zippers, snaps
- Peer assistance in the lunchroom
- Break down drawing activities into clear simple steps
- Use adapted scissors (loop or spring-open scissors), highlight area to be cut
- Incorporate functional fine motor activities into class routines

D. Gross Motor Concerns:

- Postural deviations, deformities
- Complaints of pain during physical activities
- Stiff and awkward with movements
- Lacks age-appropriate strength and endurance
- Lacks age-appropriate coordination (hop, skip, jump, run, etc.)
- Clumsy—bumps into things, falls, unsafe mobility on playground, PE
- Student uses mobility or adoptive equipment

Gross Motor Strategies:

- Consult with PE teacher, staff on playground regarding safety issues
- Check with parents regarding any medical issues that may contribute
- Place student at end of desk row to decrease need to maneuver around room
- Break movements into separate steps and physically guide the student through the activity
- Incorporate movement breaks into class routine

E. Sensory Processing Concerns:

1. Tactile Sensitivity
 - Reacts emotionally or aggressively to touch
 - Prefers long sleeved clothing
 - Avoids messy activities: glue, clay, paint
 - Scratches or picks at skin
2. Taste/Smell
 - Avoids certain tastes or food smells
 - Picky eater, especially regarding food textures
 - Strong reactions to certain smells: perfume, cleaners, etc

3. Movement Sensitivity

- Becomes distressed when feet leave the ground
- Avoids gross motor activities
- Dislikes when head is upside down (e.g. somersaults)

4. Sensation seeking

- Enjoys making strange noises
- Seeks out all kinds of movement (can't sit still, rocks in chair, fidgets)
- Becomes overly excitable during movement activity
- Touches people or objects
- Jumps from one Activity to another

5. Auditory

- Distracted or trouble functioning in noisy environment
- Holds hands over ears or appears startled by everyday noises
- Doesn't respond when name is called, but hearing is OK
- Tunes out during class discussions

6. Visual Sensitivity

- Bothered by bright lights
- Covers eyes to protect from light
- Watches everyone as they move around the room
- Has difficulty finding objects in desk or drawer
- Difficulty tracking with reading or copying off the board/overhead

7. Endurance/Energy

- Seems to have weak muscles
- Tires easily, especially when standing
- Has a weak grasp
- Poor endurance

Sensory Strategies:

1. Tactile Sensitivity

- Allow student to choose where he/she is comfortable sitting
- Encourage student to communicate need for personal space
- Provide break from too much tactile input such as quiet space on beanbag
- Gradually expose student to messy/wet materials, but do not force it
- Allow student to wear long sleeves, even if it seems too hot to do so

2. Taste/Smell

- Ask parents for a list of foods or smells that the student is sensitive to
- Discourage perfumes, strong cleaners, and other scents in the classroom
- Allow student with these sensitivities an alternative area to eat, if possible

3. Movement Sensitivity

- Do not force student to do activities where feet leave the ground (e.g. swinging)
- Provide a footstool if student's feet do not touch the ground when seated
- Consult with PE Teacher, staff on playground regarding safety issues
- Check with parents regarding any medical issues that may contribute
- Break movements into steps and physically guide the student through the activity
- Incorporate easy movement breaks into class routine

4. Sensation Seeking

- Use wiggle cushions on chairs to allow student to move in chair
- Use a weighted lap pad while child does seatwork-this helps to focus and calm
- Place student away from busy areas of classroom to limit distractions
- Provide fidgets (squeeze balls, curly laces, etc.) during circle time or discussions
- Provide frequent movement breaks
- Allow change of position when writing; standing, at table at back of room

5. Auditory

- Provide earplugs or noise muffling headphones
- Allow student to move to a quiet area if noise sensitive
- Warn sound-sensitive students of fire drills before they happen
- Place student away from noise such as fans, overhead projectors, hallways

6. Visual Sensitivity

- Place student with light sensitivity away from bright windows
- Provide a study carrel to limit distractions
- Help student organize desk items for easy visual access
- Provide paper copies of writing on overhead and board
- Provide class calming breaks with lights off, soft music

7. Endurance/Energy

- Allow student to sit in circle with back support
- Movement breaks such as jumping jacks, walks, swinging
- Provide pencil grips and reduced amount of writing
- Do hand warm-up and strengthening exercises before fine motor activities
- Consult with parents and PE Teacher re: physical causes of fatigue
- Provide appropriately sized desk and chair

Refer to “Handwriting and Beyond” manual for more strategies.