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.