

[A good pencil grip will lessen a child's frustration when doing writing tasks.]



[Certain OT activities target building core muscle strength and coordination, which is great for the classroom and playground.]



Set your child up for success at school:

- 1] Make sure your child knows how to sequence tasks. Sequencing is a major part of school. E.g. The sequence of tasks involved in a normal bedtime ritual—take a bath, brush teeth, put on pajamas—should be mastered independently well before first grade.
- 2] Pay attention to behavioral and social skills, including turn-taking, sitting still and listening. She may need your help mastering these critical skills.
- 3] Provide a physical place to study. All students need a desk or table with proper lighting and a chair that allows their feet to touch the floor.
- 4] Know your child's learning style and work accordingly. E.g. He fidgets and needs small toys to manipulate as he studies. He studies best when moving—in a chair on wheels or one that tilts. He is easily distracted and needs a quiet, clutter-free area in which to concentrate.

Do you need an OT?

Kay McCarthy is an Occupational Therapist and the Owner of Building Blocks in Kirkwood. www.kaymccrthyot.com

Occupational Therapists (OT) are trained specialists who work with children to help them strengthen their "occupation," which consists of schoolwork, learning social systems and physical coordination.

Common issues addressed by OTs:

- Fine motor concerns, e.g. difficulty gripping the pencil, difficulty writing and/or manipulating scissors. In-hand manipulation skills need to be their best so kids can do the tasks required of them with speed and dexterity.
- Gross motor issues, e.g. an inability to coordinate movements, not only during gym and on the playground but also in the classroom (staying seated, moving in the room).
- Behavioral concerns, e.g. difficulty with social awareness and following directions or acting as part of a group.
- Sensory integration challenges, e.g. an over-reaction or attention paid to things in the everyday environment (e.g. sounds, smells, tactile stimuli, etc.), which then redirects a child's attention away from the classroom and the tasks at hand.

Signs Your Child May Need to See an OT:

He has difficulty positioning himself for a task. He regularly makes physical adjustments to help orient his vision in the room. He takes too long to accomplish a certain activity. Recess is his favorite part of school. This can be a warning sign that academics are very difficult and stressful. School should be fun, and despite occasional frustrations, your child should be engaged in all areas. Your child's teacher says he is struggling. Teachers are caring individuals who want your child to succeed. When they tell you something is wrong, listen. Keep in mind that teachers sometimes will understate a problem for fear of parental over-reaction.