

# GUEST POST: What is Occupational Therapy?



## TOPIC:

“So...what is Occupational Therapy?”



## WHAT:

Don't worry if you find yourself asking this question when you first meet an Occupational Therapist (or even several times afterwards!).

Believe me – we understand! Our job title can be hard to understand from our name alone.

Let us provide some clarity...

Occupational Therapy is an allied healthcare profession that focuses on supporting people to participate in their “occupations” at times when these are challenging or not possible, such as through an injury, condition, disability or an undiagnosed problem. For us as Occupational Therapists (or

OTs), the focus is less on what the diagnosis is, but on how it impacts someone's participation in *occupations* that are meaningful to them.

As OTs, we see occupation as everything a person

- wants to do (e.g. ride a bicycle)
- needs to do, (e.g. eat, sleep, get dressed), or
- has to do (e.g. go to work)

You'll find OTs in a number of different settings including hospitals, community centers, schools, private clinics and healthcare-related, not-for-profit organisations.

Whilst the role of an OT can look different in different settings and when working with different populations, the core of Occupational Therapy remains the same – supporting occupational participation!

For the purposes of Look Hear, we'll be focusing on the role of OTs working with children in the community, meaning the child is not needing the specialist care of a hospital. If we think about the occupations of children in the community, these include:

- Self-care skills; toileting, washing, dressing, brushing teeth
- Student skills: writing, attention in classroom, organization
- Play skills: pretend play, playing video games, riding a bicycle, using musical instrument

...just to name a few! Think about all the things your child does during the day from the second they wake up, until they go to sleep– these are their occupations!

## **HOW:**

Occupational Therapists can support a child's participation in an occupation in a few different ways. They can:

- change or adapt something about the child as a person (e.g. teaching/developing a skill, like the steps to riding a bike, or tolerating a the noisy hairdryer at the shopping centre)
- modify or change something about their environment (e.g. equipment to help them in the bathroom)
- change the way they do the task (e.g. tie their shoelaces a different way)



Help me do it alone.

Following an initial meeting and assessment with the child and their parent/caregivers, an OT will then work with the child and their family in supporting them to achieve their goals. Occupational Therapy intervention may look different depending on the:

- specific difficulties a child has, and challenges they are experiencing with their occupations as a result,
- the specific approach used by the therapist themselves, and
- the service the therapy is accessed through, such as public or private services.

**Further information:**

# **How do I find an OT?**

## **Australia**

### **Occupational Therapy Australia**

- The best way to find out how an OT can help you and obtain a referral under Medicare, speak to your GP.
- To find a private practice OT, use the private practice directory on the Occupational Therapy Australia website [here](#).
- To find an OT in your local area via the National Health Services Directory [here](#):

## **United Kingdom**

Royal College of Occupational Therapists [here](#).

## **Finding an Occupational Therapist**

- Talk to your GP about contacting an occupational therapist locally, through the NHS.
- Use the online directory on the Royal College of Occupational Therapists website or Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), including independent therapists who work outside of the NHS.

Check out our Occupational Therapy Page [here](#).