

HOW OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY CAN HELP PARENTS STAY ON TRACK DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Occupational therapy is defined as “the therapeutic use of everyday life activities (occupations) with individuals or groups for the purpose of enhancing or enabling participation in roles, habits, and routines in home, school, workplace, community, and other settings.”

Occupations include “things people need to do, want to do, and are expected to do.”

➤➤➤ **The goal of the following information is to help you explore ways in which you can still participate in the occupations listed below despite being confined to your home. The following pages will walk you through each occupation and provide tips, tricks, and ideas of how to combat the “stir- crazy” feeling we are all experiencing during this time.**

1. Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)

When it comes to activities of daily living, routines and habits become incredibly important.

- **Bathing and Showering**

Routine is important. If you typically shower in the morning on days you go into work, shower in the morning when working from home. If you usually shower at night before work the next day, continue to do so. This will keep you from having to scramble to get back on track when you are ready to get back to work.

- **Dressing**

If you are feeling unmotivated to complete your work, try dressing as if you were going into work. Sitting in your pajamas all day may make you feel lazy or tired and affect your productivity.

- **Eating and Feeding**

When at home, try to eat your meals at the same time you would if you were going about your typical workday.

Avoid snacking by planning your meals ahead of time. Set a timer on your phone reminding yourself to eat your lunch or grab a healthy snack. It is so easy to become consumed by your work and/or your children which may result in forgetting to eat a meal or ignoring your hunger cues. This may cause you to eat too much in one sitting.

- **Personal Hygiene and Grooming**

Although you are working from home, you will still come into contact with your spouse and/or children, potential delivery services, neighbors, etc. It is important that you continue to practice good hygiene techniques (handwashing, nail care, toothbrushing). This will help to eliminate the spread of germs to others around you.

2. **Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs)**

- **Child Rearing**

Having your children home from school can disrupt your typical daily routine. It is important to have a plan in place of how you will provide your child(ren) the appropriate education they need as well as fun activities to keep them busy.

See documents on the OT page for a list of fun indoor gross and fine motor activities you can do with your child.

- **Care of Pets**

Do you have a dog? Take them on a walk around the neighborhood to get some fresh air! Even better, get the whole family involved. This is a great way to ensure you and your family gets a bit of physical activity.

- **Communication Management**

It is important to maintain social relationships even when confined to your home. Using various technologies to keep in touch with friends and loved ones is simple and incredibly necessary during times of social isolation.

Set up a phone call, Skype, FaceTime, or Zoom session to connect with others.

- **Driving and Community Mobility**

If you need to access the community for grocery shopping, etc. be cautious. If you feel uncomfortable going to the grocery store during this time, explore alternative options to obtain your groceries such as buying them on amazon, delivery, and pick-up services.

Do your best to avoid touching the many surfaces on public transportation. Upon arrival at your destination, immediately use hand sanitizer or wash your hands thoroughly to remove germs and prevent the spread to other individuals.

When possible, consider walking to your destination to avoid interaction with community members and the spread of germs.

- **Financial Management**

It is important to keep a detailed watch on your finances during times of crisis.

- **Meal Preparation and Clean-up**

Be sure to wash your hands before touching or preparing any food.

Use your extra time at home to plan out meals and participate in meal preparation to ensure you and your family are eating well- balanced, nutritious meals.

Remember that germs are “stable for several hours to days in aerosols and on surfaces, according to a new study from National Institutes of Health, CDC, UCLA and Princeton University scientists in The New England Journal of Medicine” (National Heart, Lung, & Blood Institute, 2020).

- **Religious and Spiritual Activities and Expression**

Has your place of worship closed due to the pandemic? Check out alternative options such as online services, live broadcasts on television, or a phone or video call with your religious leader to maintain a feeling of connectedness to your faith. In addition, explore ways to participate in random acts of compassion, spend time in nature, or practice meditation.

3. Rest and Sleep

- **Rest**

- Amidst the chaos at this time, it is important to take the time to unwind and relax. This may look different for each individual and may include things such as:
 - Reading a book
 - Watching TV
 - Yoga
 - Meditation

- **Sleep Preparation**

- Engage in routines that prepare you for a comfortable rest, such as:
 - Grooming (e.g. brushing teeth, washing face)
 - Reading or listening to music
 - Engaging in meditation or prayers

- Establish sleep patterns such as going to bed and waking up at the same time each day as if you were going to work.
 - Prepare the physical environment for sleep.
 - Set an alarm clock
 - Adjust the temperature of the room
 - Lock doors or close windows
 - Turn off electronics and lights
- **Sleep Participation**
 - Do your best to sustain a sleep state without disruption for optimal rest.
 - Avoid drinking coffee or a lot of water before bed.
 - Take care of the needs of children before bed to avoid disruption in the middle of the night.
 - Avoid bright light in the evenings as this may disrupt your circadian rhythms.

4. Work

Environment: Create a designated workspace:

- Avoid working on the couch as this may make you too tired
- Choose a space with ample lighting to keep you focused
- Try to limit distractions (TV, children, etc.)
- Keep a dedicated workspace where you do work and only work

Breaks: Schedule breaks into your day to avoid burnout.

- Set a timer for 30-40-minute intervals. Once the timer goes off, allow yourself to step away from your work for a few minutes.
- After about 30 minutes, concentration starts to decrease, so it's important to take small breaks to stay focused on your main task.
- Continue to eat meals at the same time you typically would if you were physically at work.

Ergonomics

- Be mindful of your body while you work from home
- Choose a chair with proper back support
- Consider using a hands-free headset
- Find a spot in your house that can serve as a “stand-up” desk.

5. Your Child's Education

Environment: Designate Specific Study Times

- Learn what time of the day your child works best and play to their strengths
- Make sure child eats, uses the bathroom, and gather all the materials prior to beginning

Breaks

- Try: Going for a walk, stretching, any physical activity when your child can move.
- You may use a preferred activity as break. Make sure to present the activity once child performs a portion of the task, if not all.

Use Tools to Increase Concentration

- Alternative Seating (stability balls, cushions)
- Fidgets (playdoh, stress balls, Velcro)
- Decreased environmental noise or white noise

Ergonomics

- Sit with feet flat on the ground and back on the backrest
- Head and body facing straight
- Neck should not be bent too far down or up (change height of work if necessary)

6. Social Participation

Social participation can occur in person or through virtual platforms such as phone calls, emails, texting, and video conferencing.

- Ways to Stay Social While Practicing Social Distancing:
 - Set up a Facetime date so you and a loved one can eat dinner together
 - Set aside time to play board games or card games with the members of your household
 - Allow your children to have a virtual playdate with their friends using Skype
 - Host a virtual happy hour with your friends using Zoom
 - Gather the family and complete an at-home workout together
 - Reach outside your typical friendship circle and try to connect with an old friend

MOST IMPORTANTLY, STAY POSITIVE!

We may be apart from each other, but we are all in this together!