

OPEN ARMS SUPPORT NEWSLETTER

An occupational therapy newsletter for schools, colleges, parents and carers



Yay!! It's time for the termly **Open Arms Support Services** newsletter! We're a bit late because we've been busy with clinical work and gathering ideas to include in this term's edition.

As you may know, we try to base each newsletter on the pertinent issues that we see in our work, because we want this newsletter to be as helpful as possible. This term, we're concentrating on OT in schools.

We try to use the newsletter as a way to reach out to families and professionals, so please share this newsletter with the families of your school and we really hope you find it useful!

*Many thanks,
The **OASS** team*

What do occupational therapists do in schools?

There's lots that we can do in school and on the next page the clinical areas that we can support with are listed. There are many aspects of school that occupational therapists can help with and the way we work is very varied, depending on the needs of the school and children. As school is an important productivity task for children, having occupational therapists supporting this is becoming increasingly common. Broadly speaking, we tend to assess and make recommendations on:

- How children access learning, for example; what are the barriers to learning?
- The school environment, for example, are the classrooms low stimulation? Or are the toilets easily accessible?
- How can we make adaptations to meet children's individual needs?

We also offer training on a wide range of topics, including (but not limited to) emotional regulation, motor skills, trauma informed practice, sensory processing, handwriting and neurodiversity.

Ask
an
OT...

How do I access an occupational therapist?

Via NHS services, usually through referrals from your GP or pediatrician, or if your school already commissions an occupational therapy service, via the SENDCo. Some Local Authorities will also provide occupational therapy assessments and interventions as part of EHCPs. You can also commission independent OT's and a Google search will bring up those that are available in your local area. To enquire about accessing **Open Arms Support Services**, phone **01603 767498** for a free consultation.

Do occupational therapists help with EHCPs?

Yes! We can contribute to section B and F and make recommendations for the type of environment that children will learn best in. We can also help with the tribunal process by completing assessments and providing written and oral evidence.

<https://www.ipsea.org.uk/what-should-be-in-the-sections-relating-to-education-sections-b-and-f>



Occupational Therapy In Schools

Clinical areas that occupational therapy can help with in school include:

- Understanding barriers to learning;
- Handwriting;
- Motor skills;
- Sensory processing;
- Emotional literacy and regulation;
- Well-being;
- Concentration and focus;
- Social skills and play;
- School based anxiety or refusal.
- Self care needs such as toileting;
- Provision design;
- Implementing school based interventions;
- Professional advice and supervision;
- Trauma informed practice in school;
- Meeting the needs of young people with a neurodivergent profile

How to choose an independent occupational therapist:

- Occupational therapy is a protected title so all OTs will be registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC). This means that we are required to maintain certain standards of practise. You can check the register at:

[Check the Register and find a registered health and care professional](#)

- Ask for a free consultation to discuss your child's needs and ask for information on how the OT intends to meet these needs. **Open Arms Support Services** offer a free 30 minute phone consultation so that you can see if you like the way we work and so that we can make helpful suggestions straight away,

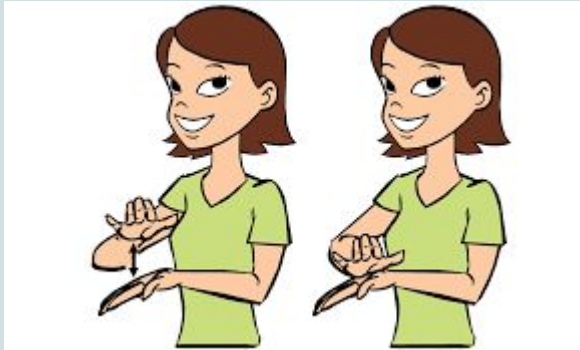
- Check things like prices, wait times, experience, what is included in the price and report.

-We should be function orientated, holistic and evidence based in our work. If you get a sense that this is not the case, or there will be a recommendation for lots of face to face interventions, question it. The OT should be able to explain their reasoning to you.

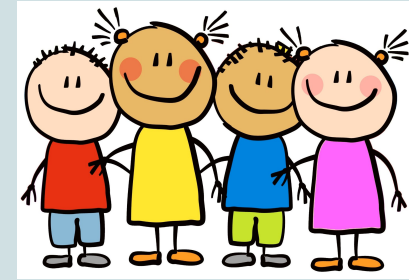
Occupational therapists help people to regain, maintain or develop skill. We help people to do the activities that they want and need to do in everyday life.

TIME TO SIGN....

This is the sign for 'school'



Clap your flat, open hands together with the top hand's fingers perpendicularly angled to the bottom. Lay your non dominant hand open, palm up and bring your dominant hand down to clap the two together.



Let's talk budgets: at the minute there is lots in the news about budget cuts in education and within SEND. We try as much as possible to make recommendations that are realistic, cost effective and functional so that ultimately, children can spend as much time as possible accessing education in a way that meets their needs. We offer training and OT oversight, rather than direct intervention, promoting a budget friendly, light touch service when it's needed.

Equipment: OTs are often associated with providing lots equipment recommendations, which can be expensive and single children out as 'different from their peers'. Older children especially don't always like this and therefore we try to use what is already available, make adaptations and use meaningful, functional activity as much as possible.



Emotional Based School Avoidance

Since the Covid-19 lock downs, we are seeing higher numbers of children and young people struggling to access school within our own clinical practice and this is also reflected in the literature. The term emotional based school avoidance (EBSA) is now regularly used to describe those who display reduced or non attendance and it is thought to affect between 1-5% of the school population. A greater number of children attend school but experience elevated levels of distress consequently. Although the term EBSA is used a lot, it is a descriptive rather than diagnostic term. It is also a complicated interplay between predisposing factors and a change in circumstance for the child/young person. We typically hear that children were managing pre-pandemic but extended periods of school closures meant that they could not face going back to school. The important question is how can schools, therapists and other trusted adults help:

- Education and school are different. Young people might not feel able to go to school, but they can still access education eg: via online learning;
- Work with professionals such as occupational therapists to ensure that young people are maintaining activity levels and having access to interventions such as anxiety management;
- All adults should work collaboratively with each other and the young person so that they feel heard and the approach is seamless;
- Have a gradual, and needs led reintroduction to school;
- Ensure the young person has a safe space and access to adults that they have a trusting, therapeutic relationship with;
- Address specific anxieties such as sensory needs.



Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. We hope you have found the information useful and that it helps to make a difference for the children and young people that you're working with and looking after.

Please do get in contact with us; we would love to hear feedback and any ideas that you would like to see in our next newsletter. Or, you may be interested in talking with one of us about how we can help support the children and young people in your provision.

Newsletter feedback and enquiries – please contact Ash Stokoe at a.stokoe@openarmsupport.co.uk

Enquiries on how we can provide support to children and schools you can:

- Contact Nikki Findlay on office@openarmsupport.co.uk
- Visit our website for more information on our service at www.openarmsupport.co.uk
- Complete a contact form at www.openarmsupport.co.uk/contact