



## Engaging Occupational Therapists to Support School Mental Health Services

The integration of occupational therapists into school-based mental health services will enrich the range of services available to support student mental health and build capacity within schools to enhance positive mental health.

### Occupational Therapists are Mental Health Professionals

- Occupational therapists are regulated health professionals and in Ontario are regulated under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*. Recognized as skilled and valued mental health professionals, they are included in mental health service teams in hospitals and in the community. The authority to perform the controlled act of psychotherapy is provided to occupational therapists under the *Regulated Health Professions Act*.
- Occupational therapists assess the psychosocial, physical, cognitive, developmental, and environmental factors that can impede or facilitate an individual's or cohort's engagement in daily occupations, including those taking place at school. In schools, occupational therapists are uniquely positioned to focus on the mental health needs of children and youth to achieve independent functioning in occupational roles such as students, players, friends and in the self-management of their mental well-being.
- Occupational therapy is an evidence-based profession that utilizes both the best available evidence in child and youth mental health literature as well as peer reviewed, scholarly research that is specific to interventions delivered by occupational therapists with a focus on improving function and participation.
- Occupational therapists have extensive training in typical childhood development and the assessment of mental and physical health conditions and disorders affecting function, which prepares them to be highly qualified in the early identification and treatment of mental health issues (Scope of Practice Statement, College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario, 2021). Occupational therapists are qualified to utilize a variety of therapeutic modalities including structured psychotherapy approaches and other psychotherapy approaches as well as activity and occupation-focused interventions.

### Occupational Therapists are Health Promoters

- Occupational therapists utilize real life occupations to promote healthy socialization and engagement. A systematic review of occupational therapy mental health interventions demonstrated strong evidence for the effectiveness of occupation and activity-based interventions in many areas, including programs that focus on social-emotional learning, school-wide bullying prevention, stress management, and the promotion of positive mental health (Arbesman, Bazyk & Nochajski, 2013).
- Occupational therapy research and literature strongly supports embedding services in the school environment and activities, lunchrooms, gyms, and common spaces. This is a distinct contribution that allows for the delivery of mental health promotion programming in unstructured and often overlooked aspects of a student's day.

Learn more, see [Occupational Therapy and School-based Mental Health Infographic](#).

**Occupational therapists can be part of the solution in elementary and secondary schools to address the increasing need for mental health supports.**

**For further information please contact the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists at 416-322-3011 or [osot@osot.on.ca](mailto:osot@osot.on.ca).**