

• OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY • SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH



School-aged children who exhibit mental health difficulties may experience challenges engaging in school-related **occupations** such as completing school work, making friends, or managing their behaviours (Prior, 2001).



Occupational therapists (OTs) are regulated health professionals who use evidence-based practices and student-centred care to provide creative solutions to functional challenges. OTs can assess and support individuals and/or groups of students, provide consultative services to school staff, and provide recommendations to families.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY (OT) SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT MAY LOOK LIKE THIS



WORKING DIRECTLY WITH STUDENTS TO SUPPORT:

- Self-regulation
- Mood challenges/anxiety
- Coping skills
- Executive/cognitive functioning
- Social skills
- Sensory processing



BUILDING EDUCATOR AND FAMILY CAPACITY

- Build **caregiver** (e.g. teacher, parent) **capacity** in understanding a student's mental health needs
- Promote transfer of knowledge utilizing an **evidence-based approach** to mental health
- Increasing educator and support staffs' confidence with a variety of strategies that may be added to the **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)**



ADAPT DAILY ROUTINES & MAXIMIZE ENVIRONMENT

- Adapt **daily routines** and **tasks** for successful access of the curriculum
- Modify the school **environment** to support peer interactions, mental health and learning (e.g. assistive technology)
- Suggest changes to the classroom that are **good for all and necessary for some**

BACKGROUND



70% of mental health problems begin during childhood or adolescence (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2016)



In 2015, **18%** of inpatient hospitalizations for children and youth age 5-24 in Canada were a result of a mental health disorder (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2015)



In a recent study, **39%** of all students in Ontario show symptoms of anxiety and depression (The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2017)

HOW OT ADDS VALUE

OTs support children and youth in participating in **meaningful occupations**, by incorporating their interests and strengths to support their needs

A systematic review of OT literature suggests that **self-regulation** (e.g. sensory processing, emotional regulation, executive functioning, social function) **improved** with cognitive and occupation based interventions (Pfeiffer, Clark, Arbesman, 2018)

Engaging OTs to deliver services targeted towards mental health promotion would **maximize use of resources** in schools

Engaging in meaningful activities may **prevent or reduce risk factors** (i.e. depressive symptoms, low self-esteem) related to **suicidal ideation** (Armstrong & Manion, 2014). OTs have specialized skills to support children and youth with mental health issues in school-based activities like participating in clubs/sports, taking on leadership roles, or supporting transitions so that they have more opportunities to experience success

OT PERSPECTIVES



"Working in schools, I start with coaching teachers on universal design, followed by specific self-regulation or executive functioning skills for individual students"

"My work in early psychosis focuses on assessing adaptive functioning, and working collaboratively with clients and families to maintain functional status"

"In transitional-aged youth services, OTs build independent living skills, vocational skills and promote successful transition to post-secondary learning environments"



Learn more about occupational therapy at
www.OTOntario.ca



www.osot.on.ca

References

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