



# OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

## **Occupational Therapists make learning fun!**

Deaf Connect Occupational Therapists (OTs) work with you and your child to develop:

- Play and social skills
- Fine motor skills – using their hands
- Self-care – grooming, hygiene, toileting, dressing, eating and sleeping
- Visual perception – understanding things they see
- Sensory processing – coping and understanding with touch, sight, sound, taste and movement
- Use of aids and specialised equipment such as wheelchairs, specialised chairs and car seats
- Use of assistive technology to help with day-to-day activities.

OTs aim to help your child develop their skills and independence so they can play with their friends, look after themselves, and develop the skills they need for school and life.

## **How do OTs help Deaf and hard of hearing children?**

Young Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) children are learning to communicate in the way that best suits them and their families. This may involve practising speech, listening, learning sign language, using pictures and symbols – or all of this at some stage along their learning journey!



In addition, DHH children may have reduced incidental learning opportunities: the learning that comes from overhearing and observing others. This can make learning everyday skills a bit more challenging: they can miss instructions (due to watching what they are doing) or miss demonstrations (due to watching/listening to instructions).

For these reasons you may need to be more direct in how you support your child – and OTs help with strategies for this.

### What strategies do OTs use?

#### Play!

This is how children learn about the world: how to get along with others, to problem solve, to communicate and to explore their senses. Play is crucial for language development: social participation in turn supports further speech and language development. When a child is more confident to become involved in an activity they are more likely to want to interact with others and communicate what they need. OTs model different types of play to children, parents and caregivers – and have lots of fun in the process!

#### Help in exploring their environment

Children need to understand and feel safe in their surroundings. DHH children respond well to toys that vibrate or use light/touch rather than noise. OTs can recommend appropriate toys, and also help you to use touch for soothing and comfort rather than sound. Safety is also critical, and OTs recommend equipment such as visual fire alarms or vibrating alarm clocks.

#### Learning how to look after themselves

OTs provide direct help with teaching children self-care: toilet training, dressing, eating challenges, and also support you to establish healthy sleep routines.

#### Support with learning to sign

OTs assist with the building blocks of signing: imitating, recognising hand shapes, body awareness, coordinating movement, and the use of face, body and hands to communicate.

#### Screening for other areas to support

Screening and assessing is important to identify any developmental issues early. Screening may indicate help is needed with difficulties such as attention span, balance and spatial awareness, gross motor skills, sensory processing, and visual perception.

#### Want to know more?

You can contact our team for support by emailing [therapy.info@deafconnect.org.au](mailto:therapy.info@deafconnect.org.au)

Sewpersad, V. (2014). Co-morbidities of Hearing Loss and Occupational Therapy in Preschool Children. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 44 (2), 28-32.