



OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PRACTITIONERS can make it easier for children with an ASD and their families to go from home or local programming to preschool. Practitioners can help adapt school activities based on a child's learning needs and help a child participate more fully in the classroom. The following tips are from occupational therapy practitioners who serve children on the autism spectrum who are preparing to enter the preschool setting.

If you want to:

Consider these tips:

An occupational therapy practitioner offers expertise to:

- Prepare your child for preschool.

- Join a play group to help your child get used to being around other children and sharing.
- Attend library story time so your child learns how to sit quietly and listen to an adult.
- Play games like Follow the Leader to help your child practice taking turns and following rules.
- Take your child places where you can practice waiting in line, such as the post office.

- Assess and improve your child's ability to play in groups, such as on the playground. This will help your child be included. Play time is an important learning opportunity.
- Provide ideas to help your child stay calm during crowded, busy, or loud times during the school day, such as on the school bus.
- Develop Social Stories about different preschool routines, like drinking from the water fountain, to help your child understand rules and expectations.
- Adapt materials like pencils and scissors, so your child can easily use these tools. Your child can then practice preschool activities like cutting and coloring.
- Help your child learn to develop life skills like carrying a backpack. This is an important way for your child to feel included and to develop independence in school.
- Help your child develop more independence in potty training, including pulling pants up and down. Using the restroom without a lot of support is an important social skill for children.

- Understand what going to preschool will mean for your child.

- Learn about the preschool programs in your community and different options for your child.
- Participate in transition planning meetings and individualized education program (IEP) meetings. Speak directly to preschool program staff.
- Visit the new school with your child and early intervention providers. This will give everyone a chance to meet the teacher, see the classroom, share concerns, and provide information.

- Work with the team to help recommend which preschool programs may be best for your child.
- Explain the differences between occupational therapy services in the school and early intervention. For instance, occupational therapy practitioners in schools will focus on child success in the classroom. Early intervention focuses on parent training.
- Teach you how to speak up for your child's classroom needs, such as fidget toys. These items may help your child participate.

If you want to:

- Share information about your child with the preschool staff.

Consider these tips:

- Give early intervention reports to school staff to help them get to know your child.
- Make your case manager aware of the date you expect your child to start in the program, such as on their 3rd birthday.
- Know the team members who will work with your child, such as teachers, para-professionals, and therapists. Contact each person directly about your child.
- Let team members know how and when you want to be contacted with updates on your child's progress.
- Share concerns and family priorities with each team member before your child starts the program. Address new issues right away. You are a part of the team and your opinion matters!
- Let team members know about successful routines used at home, in the community, and in therapy. List things you have tried with your child that have not been successful.
- Ask team members to describe an average day and week. This will help you understand what is expected of your child and identify potential issues.
- Let team members know if you are able to carry over routines and new skills at home.

An occupational therapy practitioner offers expertise to:

- Provide you and other team members with updates about your child's progress in occupational therapy.
- Watch your child in different school areas, such as the gym, to be sure he or she will be able to participate in lessons and free play.
- Help other team members decide the best way for your child to work with classroom materials. This helps the teacher offer instruction and supports your child's learning.
- Help the team decide if any changes to the school environment will help your child. For example, using a different chair for circle time may help your child be successful.
- Suggest assistive technology devices, such as switches, that may help your child be more involved.
- Help your child and the teacher develop routines that are important in school, such as washing hands before a snack.
- Work with the teacher to modify schoolwork so that your child can do the same activities as his or her classmates.

These tips can help reduce the anxiety which is common during transitions, and support a smooth transition process for families and children.

Need More Information?

Pediatric occupational therapy practitioners promote participation of all children and their families in everyday activities (or occupations). A series of tip sheets for families is available through the American Occupational Therapy Association at www.aota.org.

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Occupational therapy is a skilled health, rehabilitation, and educational service that helps people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations).

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