Occupational Therapy for children with Developmental Coordination Disorder

What is Developmental Coordination Disorder?
Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that impacts upon a child’s ability to participate in everyday activities. Children with DCD have significant difficulties with motor planning and coordination (below expected age level) and are often described as “clumsy”. These difficulties are present from early development. Children with DCD do not have an intellectual, neurological or visual impairment that can better explain their coordination difficulties.

It is estimated that DCD affects approximately 5% of children in Australia.

What is Occupational Therapy?
Occupational Therapy promotes the participation of children and young people in everyday activities. Occupational Therapists work with families to enable children to engage in everyday tasks including play, participating in preschool/school and completing self-help activities. Occupational Therapists aim to communicate and work collaboratively with other health and education professionals in your child’s life. For example, your child’s paediatrician, physiotherapist, speech pathologist or teacher.

How can Occupational Therapy help my child?
Children with DCD experience difficulty completing everyday activities. The role of an Occupational Therapist is to assist children to overcome these challenges. OTs do this by setting goals that are important to each child, directly practicing those goals and working with families to come up with solutions and strategies.

Research tells us the most effective interventions should include the following:

Activity based goals
Intervention should help children to work towards success or increased independence in a specific task or daily activity e.g., tying shoelaces, riding a bike, dressing or writing independently.

Problem solving
It is recommended that children learn to use a problem-solving approach to work through challenging activities. They can then learn to use these strategies in other activities that are difficult.

Practise, practise, practise!
Children with DCD should be provided with lots of opportunities to master new skills e.g., setting aside 10 minutes each morning to practice tying shoelaces before school.

Education and collaboration
Parents and teachers should be provided with education on how to best work with children with DCD to support their learning in the classroom and at home.
How do I know if Occupational Therapy intervention will help my child?

“Interventions” are the strategies or programs used by a therapist when working with your child.

Evidence based interventions are those that have been proven to be effective in helping children to achieve their goals.

Not all interventions have been researched and proven to be effective and there are specific interventions recommended for different diagnoses.

**Green light interventions**

**Cognitive Orientation to daily Occupational Performance (CO-OP)**
- A child centred, performance-based approach for children with problems with daily activities.
- The child learns to find his own solutions to perform the skills he wants to acquire or improve upon.

**Handwriting task practice**
- An approach that involves direct and repetitive practice of the skills required for handwriting.

**Goal directed training**
- An activity-based approach where therapists help the child to achieve their goals by helping them through step by step.
- This aims to improve functional task performance.

**Orange light interventions**

**Ball skills**
- An intervention program specifically targeting the development of ball skills through twice weekly practice.

**Assistive technology/virtual reality (VR)**
- This intervention approach involves participating in VR based motor games through gaming systems such as WiiFIT or Playstation EyeToy.

**Red light interventions**

**Don’t use these interventions**
- Sensory integration therapy
- Handwriting using a sensory approach
How often should my child see an Occupational Therapist?

The frequency of therapy sessions is usually discussed with your child’s therapist and is dependent on your child’s goals. Some interventions have specific guidelines that outline the required duration and intensity of therapy.

For example:

- Cognitive Orientation to daily Occupational Performance (CO-OP) requires 12 hours of practice to achieve results.
- Handwriting Task Practice requires 20 hours of practice to achieve results.
- Goal Directed Training requires 14 hours of practice to achieve results.

Home programs aim to increase the amount of practice your child undertakes outside of therapy. This practice has been found to be effective in assisting a child to achieve their goals sooner.

How much does therapy cost?

The cost of therapy can vary depending on the therapist and whether you are paying privately or using a funding scheme to assist with payment. Most therapists charge by the hour.

You can chat to your GP about accessing limited subsidised therapy sessions through a Chronic Disease Management Plan (CDMP) or Better Access to Mental Health Care Plan (BAMH).

Where can I find an OT?

You can find a local OT via the Occupational Therapy Australia website “Find an OT” search function: [https://www.otaus.com.au/find-an-ot](https://www.otaus.com.au/find-an-ot)

Where can I find more information about DCD?

Developmental Coordination Disorder Australia
- [https://dcdaustralia.org.au/](https://dcdaustralia.org.au/)

Telethon Kids Institute

CanChild

References


Disclaimer: The information provided in this handout is based on current research (2019) as referenced.

As further research and evidence emerges, this handout will be updated.