

occupational therapy executive functioning

Occupational Therapy Executive Functioning: Enhancing Daily Life Skills

occupational therapy executive functioning plays a crucial role in helping individuals manage and improve the cognitive processes that govern goal-directed behavior. Executive functioning refers to a set of mental skills that include working memory, flexible thinking, self-control, planning, and organization. These skills are essential for navigating everyday tasks, making decisions, and adapting to new situations. Occupational therapy (OT) focuses on empowering people to overcome challenges related to executive dysfunction, enabling them to live more independent and fulfilling lives.

Understanding executive functioning is key to appreciating how occupational therapy can make a difference. From children struggling with attention and impulse control to adults recovering from brain injuries, OT practitioners tailor interventions that address specific cognitive barriers, fostering improved problem-solving and time management abilities. Let's dive deeper into how occupational therapy supports executive functioning and the valuable strategies used to enhance these critical skills.

What Is Executive Functioning and Why Does It Matter?

Executive functioning comprises the brain's command center, responsible for managing complex cognitive tasks. It helps individuals plan ahead, initiate and complete tasks, regulate emotions, and adapt when things don't go as expected. Without strong executive functioning skills, even simple daily routines can feel overwhelming.

People with conditions such as ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, traumatic brain injuries, or stroke often experience difficulties in executive functioning. This can manifest as forgetfulness, trouble organizing tasks, poor impulse control, or difficulty shifting attention. Occupational therapy executive functioning interventions aim to pinpoint these challenges and create practical solutions tailored to each person's unique needs.

Key Components of Executive Functioning Addressed in OT

Occupational therapists often focus on these core areas:

- **Working Memory:** Holding and manipulating information temporarily, like remembering a phone number or following multi-step directions.
- **Cognitive Flexibility:** The ability to switch perspectives and adapt to changes or unexpected obstacles.
- **Inhibitory Control:** Managing impulses to stay focused and avoid distractions.
- **Planning and Organization:** Breaking down tasks, prioritizing steps, and managing time effectively.
- **Self-Monitoring:** Recognizing mistakes and adjusting behavior accordingly.

By addressing these components, occupational therapy helps individuals develop strategies that improve daily functioning in school, work, and social environments.

How Occupational Therapy Supports Executive Functioning

Occupational therapy executive functioning interventions are hands-on and highly individualized. Therapists work closely with clients to understand their specific struggles and goals, then apply evidence-based techniques to build skills gradually.

Assessment and Goal Setting

The first step in OT is often a comprehensive evaluation of executive functioning abilities. This may include standardized tests, observations, and interviews with clients and caregivers. Understanding how executive dysfunction impacts daily life guides the development of personalized goals. For example, a child might aim to improve homework completion, while an adult recovering from a stroke might focus on managing finances.

Skill Development Through Practical Activities

Occupational therapists use real-world tasks and simulations to practice executive function skills. For instance, they may use cooking activities to teach sequencing and planning or role-playing scenarios to improve problem-solving and flexible thinking. These activities promote active learning and help transfer skills to everyday life.

Environmental Modifications and Assistive Technology

Sometimes, changing the environment can significantly support executive functioning. OT practitioners might recommend organizing workspaces to reduce distractions, using visual schedules, or setting reminders on digital devices. Assistive technology, such as apps for task management or timers, can provide external support that complements cognitive strategies.

Teaching Compensatory Strategies

When certain executive functions are particularly challenging, occupational therapists teach compensatory techniques. For example, breaking large tasks into smaller, manageable steps or using checklists to ensure nothing is forgotten. These strategies empower individuals to work around difficulties and maintain independence.

Occupational Therapy Executive Functioning in Different Populations

Executive functioning challenges can affect people of all ages and backgrounds. Occupational therapy adapts its approach to meet the diverse needs of various populations.

Children and Adolescents

For young clients, improving executive functioning is often tied to academic success and social development. OT can help children develop routines, improve attention in the classroom, and manage emotions constructively. Therapists collaborate with parents and teachers to create consistent support systems that reinforce newly learned skills.

Adults with Neurological Conditions

Adults who have experienced strokes, traumatic brain injuries, or neurodegenerative diseases may face executive function deficits that impact employment and daily living. Occupational therapy focuses on regaining lost skills and finding new ways to accomplish tasks. This might involve retraining memory strategies or adapting work environments to better suit cognitive abilities.

Older Adults

Executive functioning can decline naturally with age, affecting organization, decision-making, and multitasking. OT offers interventions to maintain cognitive health and promote active aging. Therapists may incorporate brain exercises, routine planning, and environmental adjustments to support independence.

Effective Strategies to Enhance Executive Functioning Through OT

Occupational therapy executive functioning techniques often incorporate a blend of cognitive training and practical lifestyle adjustments.

- **Goal Management Training:** Helps individuals set clear objectives, monitor progress, and adjust plans as needed.
- **Task Analysis:** Breaking down complex activities into smaller, achievable steps.
- **Time Management Tools:** Utilizing planners, alarms, and timers to stay on track.

- **Mindfulness and Self-Regulation:** Teaching techniques to control emotional responses and improve focus.
- **Visual Supports:** Using charts, color coding, and written instructions to reduce cognitive load.

Integrating these strategies into daily routines can gradually strengthen executive functions and improve overall quality of life.

The Role of Caregivers and Educators in Supporting Executive Functioning

Occupational therapy executive functioning interventions are most effective when supported by caregivers, educators, and other professionals involved in a person's life. Training these individuals to understand executive function challenges and implement consistent strategies creates a stable environment for growth. Communication between therapists and support networks ensures that skill-building extends beyond therapy sessions into real-world settings.

Whether it's helping a child keep track of homework or assisting an adult in managing household responsibilities, collaborative efforts amplify the benefits of occupational therapy.

By focusing on cognitive processes that are fundamental to everyday success, occupational therapy executive functioning interventions open doors to greater independence and confidence. With personalized approaches, practical tools, and supportive environments, individuals can overcome executive function challenges and thrive in their daily lives.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is executive functioning in the context of occupational therapy?

Executive functioning refers to a set of cognitive processes including planning, organization, time management, and problem-solving that enable individuals to manage daily tasks effectively. Occupational therapy addresses these skills to improve independence and productivity.

How does occupational therapy help improve executive functioning skills?

Occupational therapy uses tailored interventions such as cognitive-behavioral strategies, task analysis, environmental modifications, and skill-building exercises to enhance executive functioning, helping clients better plan, organize, and complete daily activities.

Who can benefit from occupational therapy for executive functioning?

Individuals of all ages with executive functioning challenges, including those with ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, traumatic brain injuries, stroke, or age-related cognitive decline, can benefit from occupational therapy to improve their cognitive and daily living skills.

What are common assessments used by occupational therapists to evaluate executive functioning?

Occupational therapists often use standardized assessments like the Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF), Executive Function Performance Test (EFPT), and observational checklists to evaluate an individual's executive functioning abilities.

Can occupational therapy improve executive functioning in children with ADHD?

Yes, occupational therapy can significantly improve executive functioning in children with ADHD by teaching organizational skills, time management, impulse control, and strategies to enhance attention and task completion.

What role does environmental modification play in occupational therapy for executive functioning?

Environmental modifications such as creating structured routines, using visual schedules, minimizing distractions, and organizing workspaces help individuals with executive functioning difficulties to better focus, plan, and complete tasks efficiently.

How long does it typically take to see improvements in executive functioning through occupational therapy?

The timeline varies depending on individual needs and severity of executive functioning challenges, but many clients begin to see noticeable improvements within a few weeks to several months of consistent occupational therapy interventions.

Additional Resources

Occupational Therapy Executive Functioning: Enhancing Cognitive Skills for Daily Success

occupational therapy executive functioning has emerged as a pivotal area within therapeutic practices aimed at improving individuals' cognitive capabilities, particularly those related to planning, organization, time management, and problem-solving. Executive functioning skills are critical for navigating everyday tasks and maintaining independence, and occupational therapy (OT) provides targeted interventions to bolster these skills across diverse populations, from children with developmental disorders to adults recovering from brain injuries.

Understanding the intricate relationship between occupational therapy and executive functioning allows clinicians and caregivers to appreciate how tailored strategies can improve quality of life and functional outcomes. This article delves into the core aspects of occupational therapy executive functioning, exploring assessment methods, intervention techniques, and the broader implications of enhancing executive skills in clinical and everyday settings.

Defining Executive Functioning in Occupational Therapy

Executive functioning refers to a set of higher-order cognitive processes that enable individuals to regulate their thoughts, emotions, and actions to achieve goals. These processes include working memory, cognitive flexibility, inhibitory control, planning, and organization. Occupational therapy executive functioning interventions focus on strengthening these cognitive domains to support meaningful engagement in daily activities, whether at home, school, or work.

In occupational therapy, executive functioning is not treated in isolation. Instead, therapists look at how deficits in these areas impact occupational performance—the ability to perform tasks that are necessary and meaningful to the individual. This holistic approach differentiates OT from purely cognitive rehabilitation by emphasizing the translation of cognitive improvements into practical life skills.

Common Executive Function Challenges Addressed by OT

Individuals with executive functioning difficulties often face challenges such as:

- Difficulty initiating or completing tasks
- Poor time management and procrastination
- Issues with organizing materials or thoughts
- Impulsivity and trouble regulating emotions
- Problems with multi-tasking or adapting to changes

Occupational therapists assess these challenges in the context of daily routines and environments, tailoring interventions to meet specific functional goals.

Assessment Techniques in Occupational Therapy

Executive Functioning

Accurate assessment is critical in developing effective occupational therapy executive functioning interventions. Therapists employ a combination of standardized tests, observational methods, and client interviews to evaluate executive skills comprehensively.

Standardized Tools

Some widely used assessments include:

- **Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF):** A questionnaire completed by parents, teachers, or adults to evaluate executive function behaviors in everyday contexts.
- **Executive Function Performance Test (EFPT):** Measures an individual's ability to perform real-world tasks such as cooking or managing medications while assessing executive function components.
- **Delis-Kaplan Executive Function System (D-KEFS):** A battery of tests designed to analyze flexibility, problem-solving, and inhibitory control.

Observational and Functional Assessments

Beyond standardized testing, occupational therapists place great emphasis on observing clients in their natural environments. This real-world approach provides insights into how executive dysfunction manifests during daily activities and informs the development of personalized intervention plans.

Intervention Strategies in Occupational Therapy for Executive Functioning

Occupational therapy executive functioning interventions are multifaceted, combining cognitive training, environmental modifications, and compensatory strategies.

Cognitive and Metacognitive Training

These techniques aim to improve the underlying cognitive processes through structured exercises:

- **Working Memory Drills:** Tasks designed to enhance the ability to hold and manipulate

information.

- **Problem-Solving Activities:** Guided practice in identifying problems, generating solutions, and evaluating outcomes.
- **Self-Monitoring Strategies:** Teaching clients to reflect on their performance and adjust behaviors accordingly.

Environmental Modifications and Supports

Adjusting the environment can reduce executive function demands and facilitate success:

- Using planners, calendars, and visual schedules to support organization and time management.
- Reducing distractions in work or study areas to enhance focus.
- Implementing clear, step-by-step instructions and checklists.

Compensatory Strategies

When remediation is limited, occupational therapists teach compensatory methods such as:

- Chunking tasks into manageable segments.
- Utilizing timers and alarms to prompt task transitions.
- Relying on external memory aids to offset working memory deficits.

These strategies empower clients to function more independently despite ongoing executive challenges.

Population-Specific Applications of Occupational Therapy Executive Functioning

The scope of occupational therapy executive functioning interventions spans diverse groups, each with unique needs.

Children with ADHD and Learning Disabilities

Children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or specific learning disabilities frequently exhibit executive function impairments. Occupational therapists collaborate with educators and families to integrate cognitive-behavioral techniques, classroom accommodations, and home-based supports that enhance attention, organization, and emotional regulation.

Adults with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Executive dysfunction is a common consequence of TBI, affecting vocational abilities and independent living. OT interventions focus on retraining cognitive processes while adapting environments to support memory and planning, thereby facilitating a smoother transition back to community life.

Older Adults Experiencing Cognitive Decline

Age-related cognitive decline can impair executive functioning, increasing risks for accidents and dependence. Occupational therapy provides strategies to maintain cognitive health, promote engagement, and implement safety measures tailored to the individual's abilities.

Evaluating the Impact and Challenges of OT Executive Functioning Interventions

Research indicates that occupational therapy interventions targeting executive functioning can lead to measurable improvements in task initiation, completion, and overall independence. However, variability in individual responses and the complexity of executive processes pose challenges.

Some considerations include:

- **Generalization:** Ensuring that gains made in therapy settings transfer to real-world situations remains a key goal.
- **Time Intensity:** Executive function training often requires extended commitment, which may affect adherence.
- **Interdisciplinary Coordination:** Effective outcomes often depend on collaboration among therapists, educators, caregivers, and medical professionals.

Despite these challenges, occupational therapy continues to evolve, incorporating technological advances such as digital cognitive training tools and telehealth platforms to enhance accessibility.

and effectiveness.

Occupational therapy executive functioning remains a critical domain for fostering autonomy, productivity, and well-being across the lifespan. Its nuanced approach, grounded in functional relevance and individualized care, underscores the profession's commitment to addressing the complex cognitive demands of everyday life.

Occupational Therapy Executive Functioning

occupational therapy executive functioning: Occupational Therapy with Aging Adults

Karen Frank Barney, Margaret Perkinson, 2015-12-09 Look no further for the book that provides the information essential for successful practice in the rapidly growing field of gerontological occupational therapy! Occupational Therapy with Aging Adults is a new, comprehensive text edited by OT and gerontological experts Karen Frank Barney and Margaret Perkinson that takes a unique interdisciplinary and collaborative approach in covering every major aspects of geriatric gerontological occupational therapy practice. With 30 chapters written by 70 eminent leaders in gerontology and OT, this book covers the entire continuum of care for the aging population along with special considerations for this rapidly growing demographic. This innovative text also covers topical issues spanning the areas of ethical approaches to treatment; nutrition and oral health concerns; pharmacological issues; low vision interventions; assistive technology supports; and more to ensure readers are well versed in every aspect of this key practice area. UNIQUE!

Intraprofessional and interprofessional approach to intervention emphasizes working holistically and collaboratively in serving older adults. Case examples help you learn to apply new information to actual patient situations. Questions at the end of each chapter can be used for discussion or other learning applications. Chapter on evidence-based practice discusses how to incorporate evidence into the clinical setting. Chapter on ethics provides a deeper understanding of how to address challenging ethical dilemmas. UNIQUE! Chapter on the wide range of physiological changes among the aging patient population highlights related occupational performance issues. UNIQUE! Chapter on oral health explores the challenges faced by older adults.

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Adults Kerryellen Vroman, Elizabeth Stewart, 2013-11-18 Fully revised to reflect the latest AOTA standards, Occupational Therapy Evaluation for Adults: A Pocket Guide, 2nd Edition is a quick, comprehensive reference to guide students and practitioners as they perform efficient evaluations of adults, identify problems, and plan and implement interventions to produce optimal therapeutic outcomes. Clinical examples illustrate the application of content, illustrations demonstrate assessment techniques, and extensive tables capture information in an easy-to-read manner. This completely revised and updated Second Edition covers a wide range of new assessments and tools for community-based practitioners, includes up-to-coverage of assessing clients in natural settings, and offers a strong focus on helping readers develop practical skills for the workplace.

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Adults Kevin Bortnick, 2024-06-01 The role of measurement and the benefits of outcome measures are defined as important tools used to document change in one or more constructs over time, help to describe a client's condition, formulate a prognosis, as well as to evaluate the effects of occupational therapy intervention. Occupational Therapy Assessments for Older Adults: 100 Instruments for Measuring Occupational Performance presents over 100 outcome measures in the form of vignettes that encompass a brief description of each instrument, a review of its psychometric properties, its advantages and disadvantages, administration procedures, permissions to use, author contact information, as well as where and how to procure the instrument. Occupational Therapy

Assessments for Older Adults by Dr. Kevin Bortnick narrows down the list of possible choices for the occupational therapy student or clinician to only those with an amount of peer review, bibliographic citations, as well as acceptance within the profession. The text also includes research-based information with text citations and has over 100 tables, diagrams, and figures. Included in the review of each outcome measure: Description: A brief record of the measure. Psychometrics: A review of the level of research evidence that either supports or does not support the instrument, including such items as inter-rater, intra-rater, and test-retest reliabilities, as well as internal consistencies and construct validities among others. Advantages: Synopsis of the benefits of using the measure over others including its unique attributes. Disadvantages: A summary of its faults. For example, the amount of research evidence may be limited or the measure may be expensive. Administration: Information regarding how to administer, score, and interpret results. Permissions: How and where to procure the instrument, such as websites where it may be purchased or journal articles or publications that may contain the scale. Summary: A brief summation of important information. Occupational Therapy Assessments for Older Adults: 100 Instruments for Measuring Occupational Performance encourages occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistants to expand their thinking about the use of appropriate outcome measures with older adult populations. Using the appropriate outcome measure based on evidence can aid in the promotion of health, well-being, and participation of clients.

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occupational therapy executive functioning: *Therapeutic Reasoning in Occupational Therapy - E-Book* Jane Clifford O'Brien, Mary Beth Patnaude, Teressa Garcia Reidy, 2021-12-24 Build the clinical reasoning skills you need to make sound decisions in OT practice! Therapeutic Reasoning in Occupational Therapy: How to Develop Critical Thinking for Practice uses practical learning activities, worksheets, and realistic cases to help you master clinical reasoning and critical thinking concepts. Video clips on the Evolve website demonstrate therapeutic reasoning and show the diverse perspectives of U.S. and international contributors. Written by OT experts Jane Clifford O'Brien, Mary Elizabeth Patnaude, and Teressa Garcia Reidy, this how-to workbook makes it easier to apply clinical reasoning in a variety of practice settings. - Dynamic, interactive approach reinforces your understanding with learning activities in each chapter. - Case studies and experiential learning activities flow from simple to complex, and represent occupational therapy across the lifespan. - AOTA's Occupational Therapy Practice Framework, 4th Edition and current OT practice are reflected throughout the book. - Practical learning activities and templates are clinically relevant and designed to support reasoning in a variety of practice settings. - Video clips on the Evolve website are contributed by practitioners, educators, and students, reinforcing content and showing how therapeutic reasoning applies to real-world cases. - Worksheets and/or templates are included in each chapter to enhance learning and for use in practice. - Assessments in each chapter measure therapeutic reasoning outcomes. - Student and practitioner resources on Evolve include printable PDFs of the in-text worksheets, video clips, additional case examples, templates for assignments, exemplars, and reflective activities.

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know how to manage co-occurring conditions.

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occupational therapy executive functioning: *Willard and Spackman's Occupational Therapy* Glen Gillen, Catana Brown, 2023-07-20 A foundational book for use from the classroom to fieldwork and throughout practice, Willard & Spackman's Occupational Therapy, 14th Edition, remains the must-have resource for the Occupational Therapy profession. This cornerstone of OT and OTA education offers students a practical, comprehensive overview of the many theories and facets of OT care, while its status as one of the top texts informing the NBCOT certification exam makes it an essential volume for new practitioners. The updated 14th edition presents a more realistic and inclusive focus of occupational therapy as a world-wide approach to enhancing occupational performance, participation, and quality of life. It aims to help today's students and clinicians around the world focus on the pursuit of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent full participation.

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international and global perspectives on core knowledge and occupational therapy practice. Documents assessments, interventions, resources, and evidence in user-friendly tables Uses simple and complex cases to illustrate key concepts and ideas. New and Updated Sections in the Fourth Edition: Individual chapters on each person factor and environmental factor and occupations across the lifespan Expanded coverage of approaches for organizations and populations and entry-level professional skills Consistent framework of tables and language across chapters and sections. Included with the text are online supplemental materials for faculty use in the classroom including PowerPoint presentations.

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occupational therapy executive functioning: *Occupational Therapy with Aging Adults - E-Book* Karen Frank Barney, Margaret Perkinson, 2024-06-21 Get all the information you need to work holistically, creatively, and collaboratively when providing services for older adults with Karen Frank Barney, Margaret A. Perkinson, and Debbie Laliberte Rudman's Occupational Therapy with Aging Adults, 2nd Edition. Emphasizing evidence-based, occupation-based practice and a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach, this text walks students and practitioners through the full range of gerontological occupational therapy practice, inclusive of working with individual clients to working at systems and societal levels. Over 80 leaders in their respective topical areas contributed to the book's 33 chapters, including the conceptual foundations and principles of gerontological occupational therapy, bio-psychosocial age-related changes, environmental forces shaping

occupational participation for older adults, the continuum of health care as well as implications for communities, and the attributes, ethical responsibilities, and roles involved in gerontological occupational therapy. This edition also covers topical OT issues that are crucially important to an aging population — such as diversity and inclusion, disability and aging, sexuality, technology, telehealth and virtual environments, intergenerational connections, updates on dementia research and caring for someone with dementia, occupational justice and aging, age inclusive communities, and an expanded section on hearing — to ensure your students are well versed in every aspect of this key practice area. - UNIQUE! Intraprofessional and interprofessional approach to intervention emphasizes working holistically and collaboratively in serving older adults. - UNIQUE! Chapter on the wide range of physiological, musculoskeletal, and neurological changes among the aging patient population highlights related occupational performance issues. - Case examples help you learn to apply new information to actual client and community situations. - Chapter on evidence-based practice discusses how to incorporate evidence into clinical or community settings. - Questions at the end of each chapter can be used for discussion or other learning applications. - UNIQUE! Chapters on nutrition, food insecurity, and oral health explore related challenges faced by older adults. - Chapter on ethics provides a deeper understanding of how to address challenging ethical dilemmas.

occupational therapy executive functioning: *Occupational Therapy for Adults With Intellectual Disability* Kimberly Bryze, 2024-06-01 *Occupational Therapy for Adults With Intellectual Disability* provides occupational therapy practitioners and students with occupation-based solutions to serve and empower individuals with intellectual disabilities, as well as their families and caregivers, towards more self-determined, authentic lives. There are few texts that exist within occupational therapy that support this population. Dr. Kimberly Bryze and the contributing authors are all occupational therapists who have or currently provide occupational therapy services to adults with intellectual disability in various settings. They bring their expertise in scholarship and offer thoughtful, evidence-based approaches for practitioners to create change for individuals, communities, organizations, and society. This text presents an occupational perspective of individuals with intellectual disability given its focus on the following: quality of living social well-being role competence occupational identity self-advocacy occupational justice *Occupational Therapy for Adults with Intellectual Disability* is ideal for occupational therapy educators who teach content related to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, occupational therapy practitioners who provide services to adults with intellectual disability in various clinical, community, and residential settings, and occupational therapy students. Included with the text are online supplemental materials for faculty use in the classroom. The intentional, occupational focus ensures that the content is consistent with recommended practice in current occupational therapy. Occupational therapy practitioners will look to this text to provide evidence-based interventions and when developing consultative programs for persons with intellectual disability across many different settings.

occupational therapy executive functioning: *An Occupation-based Approach to Addressing Children's Executive Function Skills* Maria M. Perotin, 2018 Executive functioning skills are cognitive processes that impact children's ability to participate in occupations. They enable children to pay attention, resist impulses, initiate tasks, and regulate emotions. Executive function skills have been associated with various outcomes, including academic achievement and school readiness. Deficits have been recognized in youngsters with an array of disabilities that are encountered frequently by occupational therapists. Nonetheless, therapists often overlook executive function issues - concentrating instead on a narrow segment of children's needs that emphasize motor skills and sensory processing concerns. This capstone project examines executive functioning's effect on children's performance and devises an occupation-based approach to assessment and intervention. It provides an evidence-based program named Brainy Backpacks to guide occupational therapists in offering holistic, client-centered care for children who have executive function weaknesses. The project provides occupational therapists with the knowledge and skills to identify children's needs,

to offer supportive strategies, and to broaden their own lens beyond the limited focus of motor and sensory issues.

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