

ICA

Board of Education

The Collaborative Roles of PTs/OTs/Speech therapists in the School setting

Our general responsibilities are listed below and often overlap. It is very important that we are in communication with each other so that the best, most comprehensive care can be provided to the child.

PTs

- Improving trunk & head Control
- Improving ambulation & ambulation endurance
- Improving standing & standing tolerance
- Improving stairs skills
- Wheelchair seating & positioning, and recommending W/C equipment
- Recommending orthotics and walkers
- Running/ Jumping
- Balance, Coordination (basketball, kicking a ball) & Reaction time skills
- Wheelchair mobility (around obstacles, ramps, curbs, etc.)
- Training staff on proper body mechanics and transfers
- Recommending equipment & ergonomic changes to help staff with lifting/ transferring children (i.e., hoist lifts, appropriate height changing tables)
- Some role in helping students better access communication devices (i.e., via optimal positioning in w/c or adaptive classroom chair, and providing info to the team re: child's most efficient means of access such as head turning or arm lifting.)
- Adaptive equipment for children (positioning chairs, standers, etc.)

OTs

- Improving trunk & head control
- Wheelchair seating & positioning, and w/c equipment recommending
- Wheelchair mobility (around obstacles, ramps, curbs, etc.)
- Handwriting & Fine motor tasks (related to the school)
- Dressing, shoe lace tying, & other ADLs
- Upper extremities splinting
- Feeding & swallowing skills
- Some addressing of focusing & behavioral issues
- Communication device recommending, optimizing accessibility of devices, & proper positioning of children to maximize device use.
- Consulting & assisting staff on strategies/ adaptations to maximize function.
- Recommending equipment & ergonomic changes to help staff with lifting/ transferring children (i.e., hoist lifts, appropriate height changing tables)
- Adaptive equipment for children (positioning chairs, standers, etc.)

Speech therapist

- Feeding & swallowing skills
- Communication device recommending
- Speech/ vocalizations/ oral motor skills
- Communication systems (i.e., sign language, Mayer Johnson symbols)
- Assisting staff to better communicate with the child, and the child to the staff/ peers in a consistent manner

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Related Services

Commentary by Mary Muhlenhaupt, OTR/L, FAOTA

Related service occupational therapy is evolving in a changing education system that calls for improved outcomes for diverse populations of students. IDEA97, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997), emphasizes high expectations for participation and success in the general education curriculum. This reauthorization of federal special education legislation prompts attention to how families, occupational therapists and other school-based personnel design and implement children's IEP's. Programs that facilitate participation by children within a variety of school community activities contribute to IDEA's intent to prepare students with disabilities for employment and independent living.

There are challenges associated with implementing efficient and outcome-oriented occupational therapy in today's changing education system. Successful inclusive education experiences for children identify collaborative teamwork and shared goals as critical components upon which these programs are based (Rainforth and England, 1997; Giangreco, 1998). Administration support, a cohesive team with the "will and the skill" for the job, a move toward problem-solving rather than problem-finding and continued evaluation of outcomes are some of the ways to support the process and promote successful outcomes for students.

Workable strategies to encourage efficient and cooperative teamwork include clear job descriptions that address roles and responsibilities of different individuals. Team-building activities can be included in an interdisciplinary staff meeting. Therapists also need to talk with teachers in order to learn about the school curriculum. System support is required to enable the background planning and behind-the-scenes preparation that is necessary for school staffs to work together with families and integrate needed therapy services in school programs.

What are your thoughts and your experiences? How are we moving ahead to accomplish our goals? What really works and what is still getting in the way?

References

Giangreco, M. (1998). *Quick-Guides to Inclusion 2: Ideas for educating students with disabilities*. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing Co.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (1997). Public Law 105-17. 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq. www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/IDEA/motice.html

Rainforth, B. & England, J. (1997) Collaboration for Inclusion. *Education and Treatment of Children*. 20, 85-104.