

PARENT INFORMATION SESSION

Understanding Occupational Therapy

How OT helps your child build the skills to learn, play, and feel settled at school



Jumpstart Center

What Is Occupational Therapy?

“

Occupational therapy enables people of all ages to participate in the daily activities that matter to them.

— American Occupational Therapy Association

For a child, "daily activities" mainly means one thing: being able to fully take part in school and childhood.



Playing

building the motor & social skills that make play possible



Learning

sitting, attending, and using tools like pencils and scissors



Connecting

reading social cues and managing big emotions with peers



Caring for themselves

dressing, eating, and other everyday routines

What OT Works On

Four connected areas of development, all in service of one goal: full participation at school.



Fine & Gross Motor Skills

The coordination behind writing, cutting, running, and active play.



Sensory Processing

How the brain organizes sound, touch, movement, and light.



Self-Regulation

The tools to manage emotions, energy levels, and attention.



Daily Living Skills

Growing independence in dressing, eating, and daily routines.

Behavior & emotional regulation in the classroom

When a child melts down, shuts down, or seems "unable to listen," it's rarely about willpower.

Self-regulation — the ability to manage attention, emotion, and impulses — is one of the strongest predictors of how well a child adjusts to school and performs academically.



Self-regulation is one of the strongest predictors of classroom success and academic achievement.

Sankalaite et al., 2021 — Frontiers in Psychology



When the brain can't organize what its sensing — noise, light, movement, touch — the result often looks like inattention, meltdowns, or "acting out," rather a sensory problem.

How OT Helps Kids Regulate



Movement & "heavy work" breaks

Proprioceptive input (pushing, carrying, jumping) to bring the body to a calm, alert state.



Naming & recognizing internal states

Structured frameworks that help kids notice they're escalating before it becomes a meltdown.



Environmental adjustments

Seating, lighting, and noise changes that reduce the sensory load on a child's system.



Practicing tools in real moments

Coaching a coping strategy in the moment it's needed, not just on a worksheet.

Building Attention & Focus

Attention is a skill children build — not just a matter of willpower.



Movement & regulation breaks

Short bursts of activity between tasks raise alertness and support focus right after.



Breaking tasks into smaller steps

Shorter chunks reduce the working-memory load so attention doesn't run out mid-task.



Visual schedules & timers

Making expectations concrete instead of relying on a child to hold them in memory.



Grading the challenge gradually

Starting with short, engaging tasks and lengthening them builds sustained attention over time.



THE EVIDENCE

Classroom-based movement breaks show a consistent, beneficial effect on children's attention and on-task behavior.

Ruhland & Lange (2021), Sports Medicine and Health Science

Signs a Child May Benefit From OT



Fine Motor

Trouble with pencils, buttons, zippers, or scissors



Gross Motor

Falling, bumping into things, or avoiding active play



Sensory Processing

Over-or under-reacting to noise, touch, or textures



Social-Emotional

Difficulty with friendships or managing frustration



Attention

Trouble focusing, following directions, or finishing work



Daily Living

Struggle with using cutlery, dressing, or grooming routines



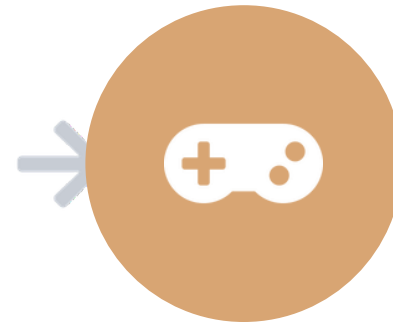
What Happens in an OT Session?

It looks like play. It works like therapy.



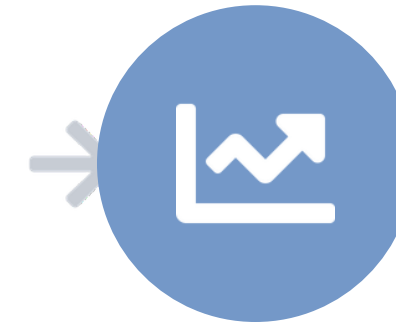
1. Assess

A play-based evaluation across motor, sensory, attention, and self-regulation skills.



2. Play-based practice

Climbing, building, drawing, and games — chosen to target real goals.



3. Track & adjust

Progress is measured, and goals are shared with parents and teachers.



Every session is individualized. There's no generic worksheet — activities are chosen because they target the exact skills a specific child needs.

Why Starting Early Makes a Difference



Children's brains are highly adaptable

A systematic review of intervention studies found that experience-based therapies produce measurable changes in the developing brain, and that childhood is considered an especially favorable window for many interventions — some are markedly less effective if delayed until adulthood.

Weyandt et al. (2020), Clinical and Translational Neuroscience



OT is evidence-based, not "soft"

A 2019 systematic review found that occupation-based, goal-directed approaches — practicing the real skill in a real context — consistently showed the strongest evidence, more than approaches that train isolated body functions alone.

Novak & Honan (2019), Australian Occupational Therapy Journal

What Progress Can Look Like

Every child's path is different — but many families see changes like these.



More independence in getting dressed, eating, and daily routines



Smoother transitions fewer meltdowns moving between activities



Stronger classroom participation in circle time, group work, and instructions



Better peer relationships from improved emotional regulation



Growing confidence as skills that felt "hard" start to click



Learning to Write



CASE STUDY

"Just holding a pencil" is actually 6 skills working together:



Pencil grasp & hand strength

the small muscles that hold and control a pencil over time



Bilateral coordination

one hand writes while the other stabilizes the paper



Visual-motor integration

coordinating what the eyes see with movements made by the hands, so the output is more refined.



Postural control

a stable, upright core frees the arms and hands to work more easily



Motor planning & sequencing

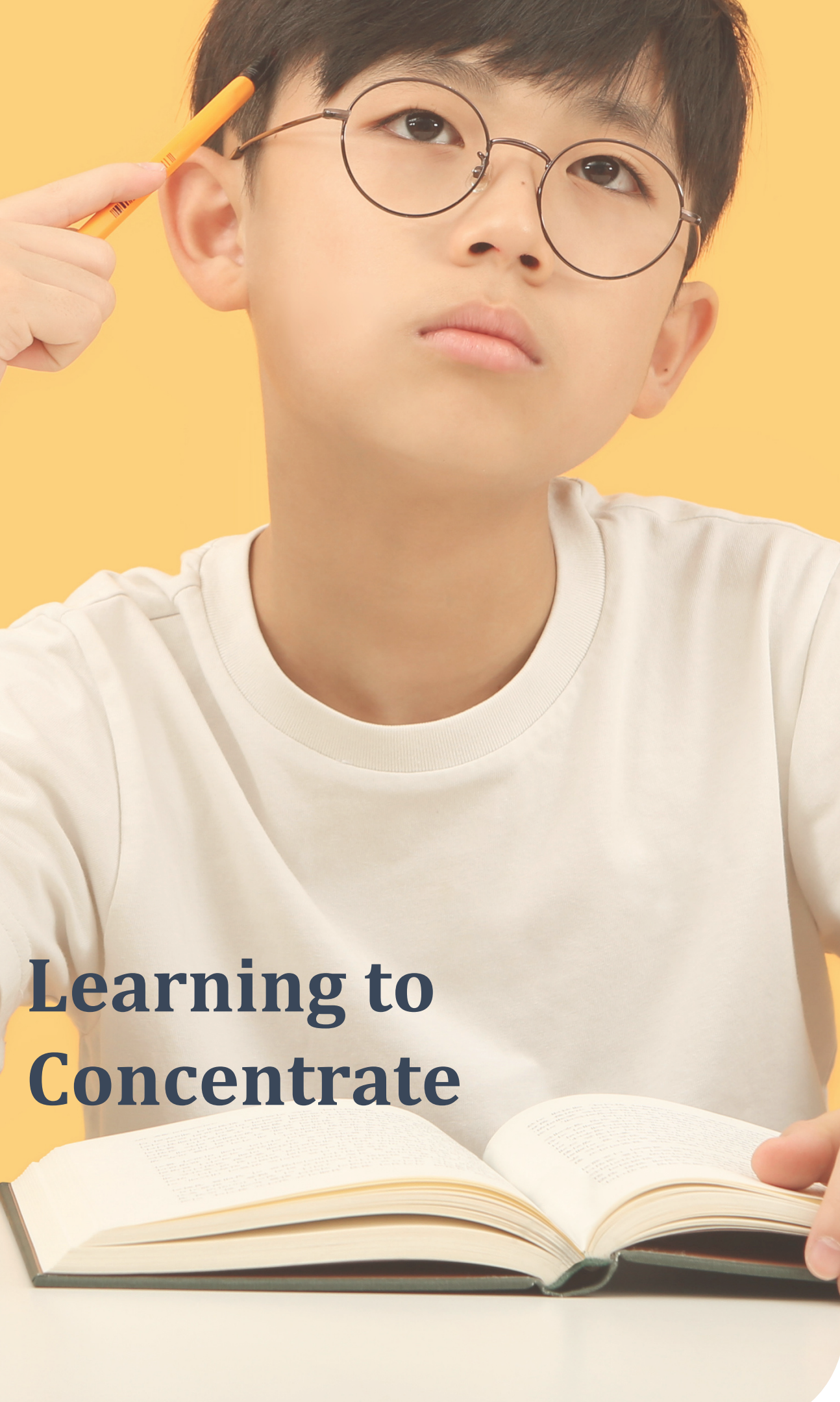
forming letters in the right order, direction, and spacing



Sustained attention

staying focused through a full sentence or worksheet





Learning to Concentrate



CASE STUDY

"Just paying attention" is actually 6 skills working together:



Sustained attention

staying engaged with a task from start to finish, even after the novelty wears off



Selective attention

filtering out background noise, movement, or side conversations to stay on task



Inhibitory control

resisting the urge to look away, blurt out, or react to every distraction



Working memory

holding onto multi-step directions while carrying them out



Self-regulation (arousal)

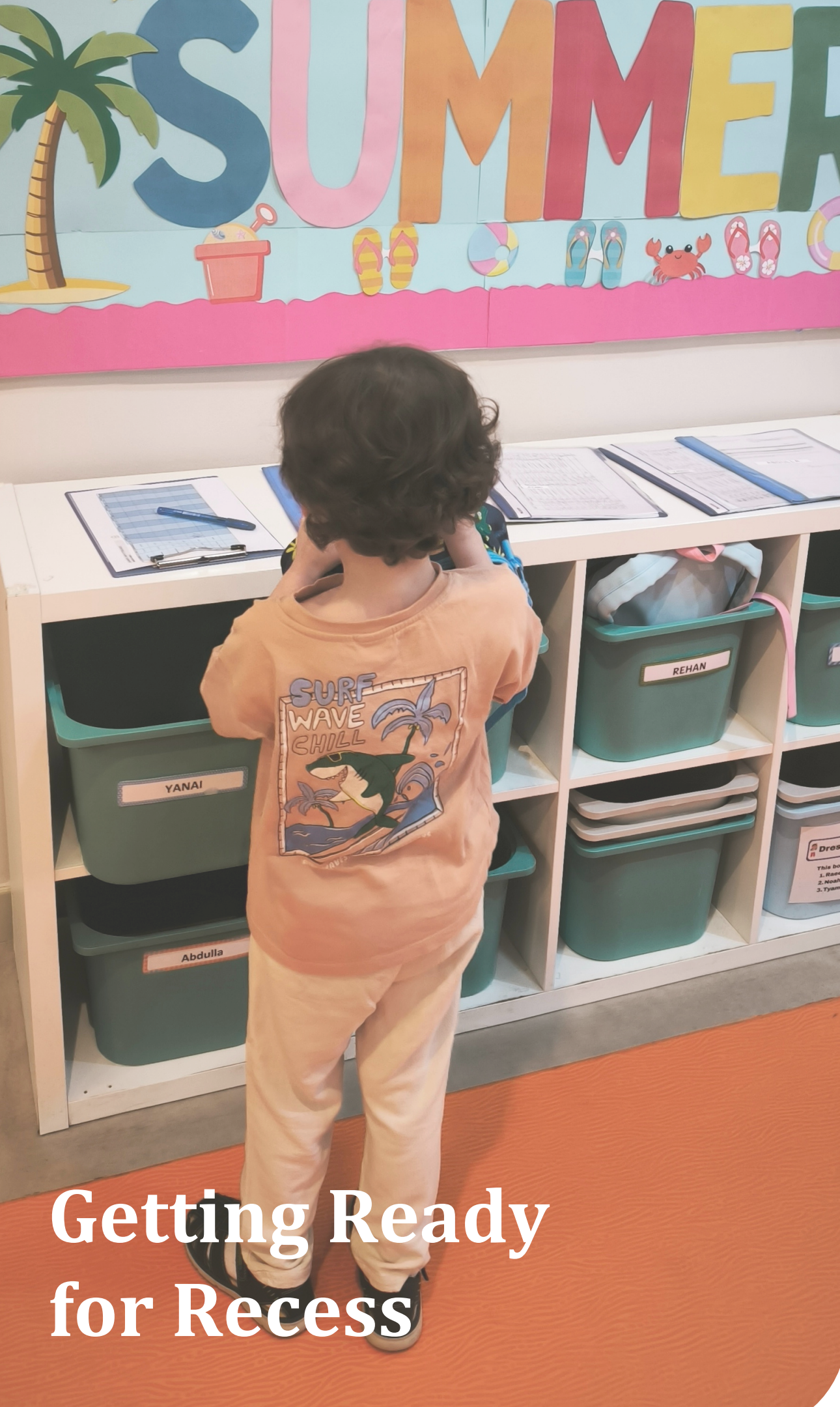
staying in a calm, "just right" alert state — not too wound up, not too tired



Cognitive flexibility

shifting focus smoothly from one task to the next without losing attention altogether





Getting Ready for Recess



CASE STUDY

The bell rings. Zipping a jacket, opening a lunchbox, and finding a hat in a cubby — all in under two minutes.

A quick daily routine that quietly depends on:



Fine motor control — managing zippers, buttons, and snaps under time pressure



Motor planning & sequencing — knowing what comes first, second, and last, without being told



Bilateral coordination — using both hands together to manage clothing and containers



Organization & executive function — keeping track of belongings and following multi-step routines



Frustration tolerance — staying regulated when a zipper snags or a step gets missed

