This pack was designed by the Community Occupational Therapy Team to offer tips and advice to school staff to help develop children’s occupational therapy needs in school. The activities in this pack need to be used before making a referral to occupational therapy - there are exceptions to this which are listed over the page. The pack describes the most common functional difficulties identified at school and provides some ideas on how to address them.
How to use this advice pack

This resource pack has been developed primarily to assist in the referral process to occupational therapy. In addition it can be used with children in mainstream school who are struggling with day to day activities.

The role of the children's occupational therapist (OT) is to work with children and young people who have difficulties with the practical skills they need to take part in and enjoy everyday life. These include skills such as:

- self care - getting washed and dressed, using cutlery etc
- school work - writing and drawing, using tools, organising themselves etc.

Referral Process

The process for referrals to occupational therapy is as follows:

- Children who are struggling with four or more daily living skills, and whose difficulties are not in line with their overall developmental needs should be referred directly to occupational therapy.
- Children whose physical needs are not addressed in this pack should be referred directly to occupational therapy.
- Children who have difficulties with three or less daily living skills or children who have global developmental delay should use this pack in the first instance before making a referral.

If you would like to discuss a referral please contact the Occupational Therapy Team.

Who is the pack for?

Teachers and support staff working in mainstream school. Some of these strategies may be useful for parents to trial at home.

Why use the pack?

Lots of children find day to day activities difficult, and may take longer to learn new skills. Children make more progress when they carry out activities for a short time daily, rather than one long session per week. Some children may carry out these activities and no longer need a referral to occupational therapy.

By using this pack you will provide the child with lots of opportunities to practice their skills and have fun. Regular practice with the child will help you to see the progress they are making.
How to use the pack

We would advise that the child is supported to carry out the strategies and activity ideas daily for a minimum of 10 minutes. Ideally this should be done for at least 5 out of 7 days. You can do more than this but the child needs to be motivated so that the activities are still fun. The activities should be carried out for 4 months to allow for progress. You may choose to work with parents/carers too so that they can help develop skills at home.

The list below is designed to guide you to the most useful advice sheet for the child’s area of difficulty. Identify which difficulties the child is experiencing from the table below and then turn to the relevant worksheet.

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<th>Worksheet</th>
<th>Area of Difficulty</th>
</tr>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Slouches/falls off chair/stool, leans against walls to prop (postural control)</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Using cutlery and scissors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Poor handwriting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How to use the worksheets

- We advise that for every child you choose 1-2 activities from worksheet A (postural control) as a warm up activity. This is because postural control is a foundation skill that is vital for success in all activities.

- In addition to worksheet A, choose 1 or 2 other activities referring to the relevant worksheet B – F. Be sure to follow the attention strategies if this is an area of difficulty for the child. Poor attention will affect skill development.

Activities can be chosen from the list on the worksheets in any order. Ensure it is an activity the child enjoys.

You can change the activities you choose from each worksheet every 2 to 3 days or when the child indicates they would like to try something else.

What if they are not improving?

If the child continues to find the activity difficult after 3 months of regular practice, it may be appropriate for the child to be referred to the Occupational Therapy Team. When completing a referral to occupational therapy please outline what strategies have been implemented at school and home, and what functional difficulties the child continues to have.

Ideally these activities will be implemented within both school and home in order to help the child make the most progress.

Remember to make the sessions enjoyable and have fun!
ACTIVITY SHEET A

Slouches/falls off chair/stool, leans against walls to prop

(Postural control)

Postural control is the strength and stability of your hips, trunk, shoulders and neck muscles. It helps to provide a stable base of support needed to develop balance and refine hand function. Children with poor postural control may slump with a rounded posture when sitting. Poor posture and sitting position can have a negative effect on fine motor skills, including handwriting.

Try the following:

- Playing games and activities in different positions to encourage weight bearing; this promotes joint stability and strengthening, for example crawling position, high kneeling or kneeling with bottom resting on feet.

- Crawling activities, for example through a tunnel, under a bench.

- Wheel barrow races.

- Jumping and hopping games, for example hopscotch, stepping stones.

- Climbing frames, swings, slides and monkey bars (all require appropriate supervision).

- Press ups against the wall or on hands and knees, make sure that the child’s nose goes in front of their hands when bending down (this ensures that they use their shoulder muscles rather than their back).

- Helping to set up for PE, moving mats, benches and equipment.

- Carrying books, a box or running errands for the teacher.
A good sitting position is important to help children to use their hands effectively.

When sitting a child should sit with their:

- feet flat on the floor with their bottom right back in the chair (use a foot rest or block if their feet do not reach the floor)
- knees and hips at 90 degrees
- arms resting comfortably on the table with room to move their elbows freely.

If the child sits with a slumped posture it may be useful to try a wedge cushion to help alter their position and promote a more upright position. See equipment list for details.
ACTIVITY SHEET B

Attention/fidgety

Children can have difficulties paying attention for many different reasons. These may be related to problems with understanding a task or distractions within the environment.

Try the following:

- Remove background noises, bulletin boards, displays and other sources of potential distracting visual and auditory stimuli.

- Remove all materials from the child’s work area that are not required for completion of the task at hand.

- Provide the child with a specific time limit for completing each task. If necessary, use an egg timer as a visual reminder. You could use a reward chart to record the child’s success.

- Seat the child at the front of the group with their back towards the other children.

- Check that the child has listened to your instructions, and understands what to do, by asking them to repeat the instructions back.

- Give the child several short tasks to complete, rather than one long task. If necessary, break down activities into smaller steps.

- Allow the child to engage in some ‘heavy work’ before a table top task. These activities give extra feedback to the child’s joints and muscles which is calming for them, for example lifting a basket of art supplies, carrying a back pack, playing with Play-Doh, or activities involving pushing or pulling.

- Give lots of positive reinforcement when the child completes the task, as well as during the activity.

- Small group activities may assist where the child has a responsibility to complete part of the group activity. The other children may help the child stay on task.
**Movement Breaks**

Children with attention difficulties often benefit from regular movement breaks throughout the day. Try carrying out some of these strategies between classroom activities; some children may need more movement than others. These can be particularly useful after transitions (playtime, lunch break etc) when the child may be finding it hard to refocus on class work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiddly toy</td>
<td>Let the child hold an object such as a fiddle toy during activities such as circle time.</td>
<td>Table push ups</td>
<td>Standing up and pushing down forcefully on the desk, as if you are trying to push the table into the floor. Count to 10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair push ups</td>
<td>Whilst sitting on hands with elbows slightly bent, try to push body up. 8 times if you can.</td>
<td>Push ups and wall push ups</td>
<td>Can be done on the floor (with knees on or off the floor) or against the wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head press</td>
<td>Place both hands on top of your head and pull down for the count of 3. Do this 5 times.</td>
<td>Pushing hands</td>
<td>Push hands tightly together. Count to 10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move ‘N’ Sit cushion</td>
<td>Try a Move ‘N’ Sit cushion to allow the student to move whilst seated in a contained manner. See equipment list.</td>
<td>TheraBand™</td>
<td>Tie a piece of TheraBand™ between the two front legs of the classroom chair. The child can then kick against this if feeling restless. See equipment list.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACTIVITY SHEET C

Dressing

Try the following:

- Ensure the child is well supported; sitting on a small chair or stool can help, or sitting on the floor with their back supported against the wall.

- Start with undressing, as this is easier than dressing.

- Establish a routine, for example pants first, then t-shirt, then socks; and follow this, the same way each time. This helps with learning because it allows the child to predict the steps.

- Lay the clothes out in the order they are put on (the same way each time). Think about how the clothes are laid out, for example lay jumpers out with the bottom part nearest to the child and the neck furthest away.

- Talk the child through the order in which clothes are put on and taken off. For example ‘Now I am putting your right foot in, now I’m putting your left leg in’.

- Let the child complete as many of the steps involved in dressing as they can. Please see the information below on “Backwards Chaining”.

- Give you and the child time when practising dressing and undressing.

- Prompt parents to choose easy clothing for the child to practice with. Larger sizes are usually easier than smaller. Big buttons, wider button holes, and labels or pictures on clothing may help them learn back to front.

- Encourage parents to adapt clothing to help the child cope at school, for example shoes with Velcro®, Velcro® on top buttons of shirts, elastic on shirt cuffs, elastic laces, toggles on coats or elastic waistbands.

- Encourage the child to use a mirror to check how they look, for example to see if their sweatshirt is pulled down at the back. Dressing in front of a mirror helps some children organise themselves while they are getting dressed.

Remember to make dressing fun; if it is age appropriate try dressing-up games. Children find it easier to dress with clothes that are too big for them.
Backward chaining

‘Backward chaining’ is a useful method that gives some children a sense of achievement when dressing. The idea is that the child completes the last part of the dressing task, so that they get the reward of completing the task. As their skills develop they can carry out more and more of the task until they can do it all. For example – socks:

- Place the sock on the child’s foot and encourage them to pull the sock up their leg.
- Next, let the child pull the sock over their heel and up their leg.
- Lastly, let the child pull the sock over their foot and heel and up their leg independently.
ACTIVITY SHEET D

PE skills

When working on these activities ensure it is at the ‘just right’ challenge for the child. Not too easy and not too hard. As they progress you may increase the difficulty of the task.

Try the following:

- Animal walks - child tries to imitate movements of a crab, frog, duck, bear or other animals.
- Obstacle course - encourage the child to sequence and plan several actions, for example go under the table, over the chairs, through the hoop, etc.
- Throw a bean bag into a bucket or box: this is easier than throwing to another child. You can make this more challenging by asking the child to stand on one leg or in a high kneeling position.
- Ball games - throw a ball against a wall and clap your hands before catching it again. Bounce a ball along a line, or into a hoop or a ring, etc.
- Jumping games, for example hopscotch.
- Action games - Simon says, follow the leader, etc.
- Musical statues - the child runs, dances, skips, jumps in time to music; when the music stops the child freezes in that position.
Ball skills

Try the following:

- Burst bubbles by clapping hands together.
- Catching scarves in the air.
- Hit balloons in the air, with either hand or with a bat or racket.
- Roll a ball back and forth to the child while sitting on the floor.
- Roll a ball in a straight line to hit a target. Move a little further away after each turn. Remember larger balls should be easier than smaller balls.
- Roll a ball to knock down homemade skittles, for example plastic bottles filled with dirt, sand or water.
- Bounce a ball on the ground with two hands and catch it.
- Throw a ball in the air and catch it as it comes back down.
- Throw and catch a ball with a partner.
- Throw a ball against a wall and catch it. Throw it in different ways, such as letting the ball bounce before hitting the wall, not letting it bounce after hitting the wall.
- Throw a ball at a target on a wall or fence.
- Throw a ball into a target on the ground, for example a basket, box, bucket or hoop. If the activity is too difficult with a ball, try using a bean bag.
- Play swing ball.
ACTIVITY SHEET E

Using cutlery and scissors

Using cutlery

Things to consider:

- A good sitting position at the table is important. The child should be at the right height in relation to the table with their feet supported, for example with a stool under their feet. Check that the plate is in front of the child, and is not likely to slip around; a placemat can help with this.

- Have the right tools for the job! A serrated knife is easier for cutting meat and other tough textures, while a non-serrated knife is easier for spreading butter on bread.

- Ensure the cutlery is the correct size for the child. Child-sized or cutlery with wider handles is easier to hold and use. Junior Caring Cutlery (available from online retailers) has shaped handles that promote appropriate hand placement.

- Look at how the child is holding their knife and fork. Their hands should be pointing down towards the plate. To increase the pressure they can apply when cutting show them how to point their index fingers down the shaft of the knife and fork.

- If the child is right-handed, they should hold their knife in their right hand. If the child is left-handed, allow them to choose which hand to hold their knife in.

Try the following:

- Practice using a knife and fork during a fun activity to avoid frustration. Let the child try to cut Play-Doh or cookie dough.

- Teach one step at a time; let the child master one step before attempting the next, ie
  - stab Play-Doh balls with the fork
  - saw backwards and forwards with the knife
  - use the knife and fork together.

- Try guiding the child’s movements by placing your hands over theirs while cutting. This allows the child to feel the necessary movements for cutting.
• It is easier to practice cutting with soft foods, e.g. fish fingers, egg, boiled potato, well-cooked vegetables. You could slice ‘round’ food in half to stop them rolling round the plate, e.g. potatoes or sausages.

• At mealtimes, start by asking the child to use their knife and fork for just one item, then gradually increase the amount they do as their skill and confidence increases.

**Scissor skills**

Cutting relies on the development of many skills, including hand strength and using both hands together. We learn to cut in the following sequence: cutting straight lines —> cutting circles —> cutting around corners —> cutting complex shapes/curved lines.

• When holding scissors and cutting materials, the thumbs of both hands should point upwards. You can place a small sticker on the top of the child’s thumbs, to provide a visual cue to remind them which way is up. You can also draw dots alongside the shapes the child is cutting, as a prompt for where to position their thumb when cutting.

• Make sure they are sitting comfortably with their feet supported.

• Remind the child to cut slowly, progressing from large to smaller movements. This can initially be done in an unskilled manner with more tearing than cutting.

• Cutting materials such as Play-Doh or straws is an easier way to learn than cutting paper. Cutting thin card is also easier than cutting paper.

• Cutting exercises should always be supervised by an adult.

• Remember it is easier for right-handed children to cut out shapes **anti-clockwise** and left-handed children to cut out **clockwise**. If you are supporting a left-handed child and are right-handed, or vice versa, it is advisable that when demonstrating cutting you either change hands or sit opposite the child so that they can mirror you.

For left-handed children

• It is important that a left-handed child use a pair of left-handed scissors. The wrong scissors result in an awkward cutting technique, jagged lines and also make it difficult for the child to see the line that is being cut, as the view is blocked by the blade.

• When cutting out shapes, directionality is important. Left-handers find it easier to cut out shapes in a clockwise direction whilst right-handers use an anti-clockwise direction. When teaching or modelling to a child, be aware of this and put directional arrows on shapes to help them learn the correct way to cut.
- Remember if you are teaching a left-handed child how to use scissors and you are right-handed, either sit opposite them for them to ‘mirror’ you or use your left hand.

Try the following:

- Pick up games - use kitchen tongs or tweezers to pick up cotton wool or small toys and place them into a container. Start with large objects and progress to smaller objects that require more accurate movement. See how many objects you can move in one minute.

- Happy hedgehog - cut straws and stick them into a ball of Play-Doh shaped like a hedgehog. You may need to hold the straws to help the child cut them. Encourage the child to push the straws into the Play-Doh and squeeze the Play-Doh to make nose and feet.

- Squeeze play - practise opening and closing hand action (squeezing) by using Play-Doh, soft balls, water pistols or water spray bottles. Allow the child to squeeze using both hands, then one hand, then just between their thumb and two fingers.

- Two-handed activities - opening jars, stabilising paper when drawing, pouring, holding a bowl and stirring, using a knife and fork, wind-up toys, lacing/threading.
Handwriting

This activity sheet has the following sections:

- Letter formation
- Messy handwriting
- Word spacing
- Touch typing

Choose the area of concern for the child you are working with.

**Letter formation**

*Correct letter formation* is important for developing neat and efficient handwriting, and is necessary for joining letters later on.

Things to consider:

- A good sitting position is essential to provide the child with a stable base of support; please refer to page 5 for more details.

- An awkward pencil grip can have a big impact on letter formation.

- When teaching letter formation, consider starting with capital letters. Developmentally, children are able to produce simple shapes and forms such as vertical, horizontal, diagonal lines and circles needed for capital letters. It is best to master these before moving onto lower case letters that require more complex shape formation.

For left-handed children

- Left-handed children often benefit from using a sloping board, to assist them to see their work.

- The left-handed child often finds it easier to hold the pencil 2.5-3.5 cm from the tip of the pencil (further up the shaft of the pencil than a right-handed child).

- The way a left-handed child forms a letter will sometimes differ from the way of a right-handed person. For example the letter t, the vertical line would be drawn as normal but the cross on the t would be formed from right to left rather than left to right.

- Left-handed children benefit from having demonstration letters placed at intervals across the lines in their handwriting books. They are less likely to obscure the examples with their writing hand.

Try the following:

- To improve pencil grip experiment with thicker pencils, pencil grips, or small stubby chalks.
Fun activities focusing on using tweezers and tongs can help develop the strength and grasp required for accurate pencil control. Please refer to page 14 for some more tips, for example pick up games.

Letter formation is best learned using a multisensory approach. Consider using smell, touch, body positions and verbal cues for letter formation activities. Have fun forming letters using fingers in shaving foam, on chalk boards, water icing etc. Have pupils write letters with fingers on each other’s backs and guess the letter.

Emphasise starting points for letters and the correct direction of lines. Children often look as though they have written the letter correctly, however they may have used segmented line to get to that outcome. You can use green and red dots to prompt a starting and finish point.

Remember to give clear, simple, consistent verbal directional prompts.

Children often find it easier to learn letter shapes in groups, for example letters starting with a c curve such as o, a, d or line letters such as l, and i.

Tape a copy of the alphabet to the desk as a visual prompt.

If you have a tablet or smart phone, try a letter formation app such as: (www.nessy.com/hairyletters, http://www.hwtears.com, https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/little-writer-tracing).

Messy handwriting

You may be worried about the neatness of a student’s handwriting. Below are some of the common issues raised by teachers and some ideas for how to overcome these.

Try the following:

Writing on the line and sizing of letters

- Paper with different lines can be used to encourage sizing and placement of letters. Try using colour coded lines to help the student learn the correct sizing and position of letters.

‘Tall letters touch the sky’
‘Short letters stay on the grass’
‘Long letters have roots in the underground’

These coloured lines can then be removed and replaced with a feint line before removing altogether.

- Highlight the line as a prompt for the student to write on. Alternatively a thin line of dried glue will provide a raised surface to give sensory feedback and remind the student to write on the line.
• Squared paper is also useful to encourage similar sizing of letters.

For the left-handed child
• The paper should be positioned to the left of the child’s midline (centre of their body) and should be slanted so the left side is parallel to the child’s forearm as the child writes across the line. Many children see their writing better if the page is slanted to as much as 45 degrees.

• The hand is positioned so that it is always below or to the left of the writing line as the child writes from left to right across the page. If the writing line goes under the hand (as it does in a right-hander) vision will be blocked.

Letter reversals
• Practice tracing letters and naming them afterwards to enforce recognition of letters. Encourage the child to trace letters in different textures such as shaving foam, paint or sand.

• Games such as ‘Spot-the-difference’ or ‘Odd-one out’ may help a child with reversal difficulties.

Pencil pressure
• Reducing pressure: try writing on different surfaces that rip easily, this will encourage students to use less pressure. Try material such as Play-Doh, tin foil or tissue backed onto cardboard.

• Increasing pressure: use textures that require increased pressure to make writing visible, such as writing on ribbed cardboard, sandpaper, or using a pencil with softer lead.

• Try scribbling with varied pressure so that students can learn to ‘feel’ the difference.

Fluency and pencil control
• Practice copying fluency patterns. It is easier to start with larger patterns before trying smaller ones. See if the student can go from one side of the page to the other without lifting their pencil.

• Drawing through mazes and dot to dots.

Word spacing
Many children have difficulty with spacing words when writing sentences, often making their handwriting difficult to read. Children need room when learning how to write. Worksheets often do not provide enough space for children to write what is intended. Children who have difficulty with word spacing may have some underlying visual perceptual difficulties.

Try the following:
• Whenever possible, modify worksheets to provide extra space for handwriting.
When modelling writing, start with exaggerated spaces between words that the child will copy, to increase awareness of space.

Use a physical prompt such as a dot, sticker or button between words to prompt the child to leave space.

The child can also place a finger in between each word.

Encourage the child to draw a circle in pencil between each word.

Draw a coloured line or highlight space between words in a sentence that the child has to copy to give him/her a visual cue.

Try using graph paper or science paper in various sizes. Instruct the child to leave one box open as a space between words.

Let the child review their own work to determine if there are adequate spaces between the words.

Some students respond better to concrete instruction such as "Move your pencil over before you start the next word."

Say the word ‘space’ after writing each word as a verbal prompt.

Apps that support writing skills

There are various apps available that can help support writing skills, particularly in the area of letter formation. For example:

- ABC cursive writing
- My ABC tracer
- 123 Writing
- Little writer for kids
- Brightstart

As a service we cannot recommend any particular apps, please make your own judgement on whether these will be useful and motivating for the child you are working with.
Touch typing

For some children who really struggle with handwriting and have done for a long time, a useful skill to develop may be touch typing.

Try the following:

- Explore touch typing as an option. There are many online resources aimed specifically at children that teach touch typing. Remember to monitor the child playing the games, as they may fall in to bad habits of typing with single fingers. Before the child moves onto the fun game ensure they complete the practice section.
  - Dance Mat Typing at www.bbc.co.uk/schools/typing
  - www.sourceforge.net/projects/tuxtype/files

- There are many different typing games online; this is a fun way to teach typing. The following is a list of games available for free on the internet. Playing lots of different games will keep the child more interested.
  - www.freetypinggames.com
  - www.rapidtyping.com
  - www.freeonlinetypinggames.com/
  - www.onlytypinggames.com/games/
  - www.games.funschool.com/game type me.html?g=1175&category=0&level-0
  - www.miniclip.com/hangaroo.htm
  - www.mrkent.com/games/balloonblast/index.asp
  - www.customtyping.com/goalie_demo.htm

- It may also be useful to consider making a referral to the CENMAC service. This is a support service offering assessments, reviews and loan of equipment to help students with a disability access the curriculum using assistive technology. To make a referral see www.cenmac.com/about/refer-a-pupil/
Supplementary referral sheet

Name of child:…………………………     Date of birth…………………

Referral to occupational therapy, use of resource pack not indicated

- ………………… has 4 or more functional skills difficulties (refer to table on page 3) in the following areas:
  1.
  2.
  3.
  4.

More:

He/she is within average to above average range for academic attainment. We wish to make a referral to your service. Please attach the community services referral form. You can find it at:


Signed……………………….      Name :………………………………..     Date:……………….

Referral to occupational therapy following use of resource pack

- We have followed the resource pack for ……. months. We would now like to make a referral to occupational therapy.

- Please fill in the table over the page. This must be completed before your referral can be accepted.

Completed by: ……………………………...      Duration of input: ……………………………...
Please see attached this form as evidence of additional work, completed prior to referral to the community Occupational Therapy Service.

Hours of practice per week:………………………………………… School Action: Y / N

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed difficulty</th>
<th>Activities/skills practiced</th>
<th>Observations/progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catching a ball</td>
<td>Popping bubbles while clapping</td>
<td>Needed hand on hand initially. After 1 week able to do on their own. To progress to catching balloons in second week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contact us
If you have any questions or concerns about the school resource pack, please contact the Occupational Therapy team at the Mary Sheridan Centre (Lambeth) on 020 3049 6020 (Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm) or Sunshine House (Southwark) on 020 3049 8181 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm). This pack is not to be reproduced without consent of the occupational therapy service manager for the Children’s Community Occupational Therapy department, Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust.