

OT Red Flags Checklist

When to seek an occupational therapy evaluation for fine motor or sensory concerns

Early intervention makes a significant difference. If you check 3+ items in your child's age group, request an OT evaluation through your pediatrician or school.

Infant (0-12 months)

- Does not bring hands to midline by 4 months
- Not reaching for or grasping objects by 6 months
- Strongly prefers one hand before 12 months
- Avoids tummy time or has very low muscle tone
- Does not transfer objects between hands by 7 months
- Extreme aversion to certain textures (food, fabric)

Toddler (1-3 years)

- Cannot stack 3+ blocks by 18 months
- No scribbling by 18 months
- Cannot turn pages of a book by 2 years
- Excessive drooling or difficulty with spoon/fork
- Avoids or is distressed by messy play (paint, sand, food)
- Does not use both hands together for tasks
- Seems clumsy or falls frequently

Preschool (3-5 years)

- Cannot cut with scissors by age 4
- Avoids coloring, drawing, or craft activities
- Cannot copy a circle by age 3 or a cross by age 4
- Difficulty with buttons, zippers, or snaps
- Still uses full-fist grasp on crayon/pencil at age 4+
- Overwhelmed by busy or noisy environments
- Difficulty with transitions or unexpected changes in routine

School Age (5+ years)

- Handwriting is illegible despite effort and practice
- Extreme fatigue or hand pain from writing
- Persistent letter/number reversals after age 7
- Cannot tie shoes by age 7
- Poor body awareness – bumps into things, misjudges space
- Difficulty organizing materials, desk, backpack
- Avoids or melts down over fine motor tasks
- Trouble with attention and sitting still beyond what's age-typical

WHAT OT ADDRESSES

Fine motor skills, handwriting, sensory processing, visual-motor integration, self-care skills, executive function support, and adaptive equipment recommendations

WHERE TO GET EVALUATED

Pediatrician referral to outpatient OT, school-based OT evaluation (free through the school district), or private OT clinic

TYPICAL DURATION

Weekly sessions of 30–60 minutes for 3–12 months depending on severity. Home programs are critical for carry-over.

EARLY INTERVENTION ACCESS

You don't need a diagnosis to request a school-based OT evaluation. Under IDEA, you can submit a written request to your school district at any time, and they must respond within a set timeframe (varies by state, typically 60 days).