Occupational Therapy (OT) Glossary

Occupational Therapy (OT) Related Words, Terms, and Phrases

Adaptive Response: An appropriate and successful action in meeting some environmental demand. All learning and social interactions are driven by adaptive responses, which demonstrate adequate sensory integration.

Auditory: Language processing skills are the abilities to listen and communicate verbally that one develops as one hears and perceives sounds and interacts with the environment.

Auditory Figure-Ground: The ability to distinguish between foreground and background sounds so that one can focus on a specific sound or voice without being distracted by other sounds.

Auditory Perception: The ability to receive, recognize, discriminate, comprehend, and respond to sounds.

Bilateral Coordination: The ability to use both sides of the body simultaneously and in a coordinated manner.

Bilateral Integration: The neurological process by which sensations from both sides of the body are integrated; the foundation for bilateral coordination.

Binocularity (Binocular Vision; Eye Teaming): Creating a single visual image from two separate images recorded by the eye.

Body Awareness: The mental representation of one's own body parts, including where they are, how they interact, and how they move.

Cocontraction: All muscle groups surrounding a joint contracting and "working" together to provide that joint stability resulting in the ability to maintain a position.

Depth Perception: The ability to see objects in three dimensions and judge relative distances between objects or between oneself and objects.

Directionality: The ability to move oneself in the directions of right/left, forward/back, and up/down.

Discriminative System: A sensory system component that allows one to distinguish between stimuli. This system does not develop naturally, but rather with time and practice.

Dyspraxia: Deficient motor planning, which is frequently associated with a decrease in sensory processing.

Eye-Hand Coordination: The effective collaboration of the eyes and hands, which is required for activities such as playing with toys, dressing, and writing.

Equilibrium: A term that means "balance."

Extension: A joint straightening action (neck, back, arms, legs).

Fight-Or-Flight Response: The instinctive reaction of becoming aggressive or withdrawing in response to real or perceived danger.

Figure-Ground Perception: The ability to distinguish a figure in the foreground from a competing background.

Fine Motor: Referring to muscle movement in the fingers, toes, eyes, and tongue.

Fine Motor Skills: The expert use of one's hands. It is the ability to move one's hands and fingers smoothly, precisely, and controllably. Fine motor control is required for effective use of classroom tools and materials. Dexterity is another term for it.

Fixation: Aiming one's gaze at something or shifting one's gaze from one thing to another.

Flexion: A joint bending action or a body part pulling in.

Focusing: Allowing one's vision to move smoothly between close and far objects.

Form Constancy: Recognition of a shape regardless of its size, position, or texture.

Gravitational Insecurity: Extreme fear and anxiety that one will fall when the position of one's head changes.

Gross Motor: Movements of the body's large muscles.

Gross Motor Skills: Body movements that are coordinated and involve large muscle groups. Running, walking, hopping, climbing, throwing, and jumping are all activities that require this skill.

Habituation: The neurological process of tuning out familiar sensations.

Hand Preference: Right- or left-handedness, which develops in a child as lateralization of the cerebral hemispheres occurs.

Hypersensitivity: (also Hyper-reactivity or Hyper-responsiveness). Oversensitivity to sensory stimuli, manifested as either fear and caution or negativity and defiance.

Hypersensitivity to Movement: A sense of disorientation and/or avoidance of linear and/or rotary movement.

Hyposensitivity: (also Hyporeactivity or Hyporesponsiveness). Undersensitivity to sensory stimuli, manifested as a desire for intense sensations or a tendency to withdraw and be difficult to engage.

Inner Drive: Every individual's self-motivation to actively participate in experiences that promote sensory integration.

Integration: The joining of several parts to form a unified, harmonious whole.

Kinesthesia: The conscious awareness of joint position and body movement in space, such as knowing where to place one's feet when climbing stairs, without visual cues.

Lateralization: The process of training one side of the brain to preferentially direct skilled motor function on the opposite side of the body, while the opposite side is used for stabilization. Lateralization is required for establishing hand preference and crossing the midline of the body.

Linear movement: A motion in which one moves in a line, from front o back, side to side, or up and down.

Low Tone: A lack of supportive muscle tone, usually accompanied by increased joint mobility; the person with low tone appears "loose and floppy."

Midline: A median line that divides the body into two halves. The ability to use one side or part of the body (hand, foot, or eye) in the space of the other side or part is referred to as crossing the midline.

Modulation: The ability of the brain to regulate its own activity.

Motor Control: The ability to regulate and monitor one's muscle group's motions in order for them to work together harmoniously to perform movements.

Motor Coordination: The ability to regulate and monitor the motions of one's muscle groups in order for them to work in harmony to perform movements.

Motor Planning: The ability to imagine, organize, sequence, and execute an unfamiliar and complex body movement in a coordinated manner, a piece of praxis

Muscle Tone: The amount of tension that is normally present when one's muscles are relaxed or at rest.

Oscillation: Up and down or to and fro linear movement, such as swinging, bouncing, and jumping.

Perception: The meaning that the brain assigns to sensory input.

Plasticity: The brain's ability to change or be changed as a result of activity, particularly as one responds to sensations.

Position in Space: Awareness of the spatial orientation of letters, words, numbers, or drawings on a page, or of

an object in the environment.

Postural Adjustments: The ability to move one's body to change positions for a task.

Postural Insecurity: fear of body movement that related to poor balance, and deficient "body-in space" awareness.

Postural Stability: Being able to keep one's body in a position to complete a task or demand efficiently by using large muscle groups at the shoulders and hips.

Praxis: The ability to successfully interact with one's physical surroundings; to plan, organize, and carry out a series of unfamiliar actions; and to do what one needs and wants to do. Praxis is a broad term that refers to self-directed and coordinated action. Motor planning is a term that is frequently used as a synonym.

Prone: A horizontal body position with the face pointing downward.

Proprioception: The "position sense" is the unconscious awareness of sensations emanating from one's joints, muscles, tendons, and ligaments.

Receptive Language: The ability to comprehend how words express ideas and feelings; language acquired through listening and reading.

Rotary Movement: turning or spinning in circles.

Self-Help Skills: Competence in personal care activities such as bathing, dressing, eating, grooming, and studying.

Self-Regulation: Self-organization is the ability to control one's activity level and state of alertness, as well as one's emotional, mental, or physical responses to senses. Sensorimotor: refers to the brain's behavior of receiving sensory messages and responding with a physical response.

Sensory Defensiveness: A child's reaction to sensory input, indicating severe overreactions or a low threshold to a specific sensory input.

Sensory Diet: the multisensory experiences that one seeks on a daily basis to satisfy one's sensory appetite; a planned and scheduled activity program developed by an occupational therapist to assist a person in becoming more self-regulated.

Sensory Dormancy: A child's reaction to sensory input, indicating under-responsiveness or a high threshold to a specific sensory input.

Sensory Input: The continuous flow of information from the body's sensory receptors to the brain and spinal cord.

Sensory Integration: The normal neurological process of gathering information from one's body and environment via the senses, organizing and unifying that information, and using it to plan and execute adaptive responses to various challenges in order to learn and function smoothly in daily life.

Sensory Integrative Dysfunction: Inefficient neurological processing of sensory information, resulting in difficulties with learning, development, and behavior.

Sensory Integration Theory: A neurology, research, and behavior-based concept that explains the brain-behavior relationship.

Sensory Integration Treatment: An occupational therapy technique that provides playful, meaningful activities that increase sensory intake and lead to more adaptive functioning in daily life.

Sensory Modulation: Increasing or decreasing neural activity in order to keep it in sync with all other nervous system functions. Maintaining an arousal state in order to elicit emotional responses, maintain attention, develop an appropriate activity level, and move skillfully.

Sensory Orientation: Selective attention, which encourages us to engage with the stimulus, respond, and learn.

Sensory Processing Skills: The ability to receive and process information from one's sensory systems, which include touch (tactile), vision, auditory (hearing), proprioceptive (body position), and vestibular (hearing) (balance). The child's ability to process sensory stimuli has a large influence on his or her behavior, attention, and peer interactions.

Sensory Registration: Initial recognition of a single input. A stimulus's value and emotional tone are assigned.

Sensory Threshold: Each sensory system has its own neural responses to sensory input. The point at which sensory input is combined and activates the central nervous system. This is the mechanism that determines whether we over-react to sensory input or under-register it.

Somatosensory: Body sensing is the tactile-proprioceptive perception of touch sensations and body position.

Spatial Awareness: The perception of one's proximity to, or distance from, an object, as well as the perception

of the relationship of one's body parts.

Supine: Horizontal body position where the face is pointed upward.

Tactile: Refers to the sense of touch and the various qualities associated with touch, such as the ability to detect pressure, temperature, light touch, pain, and discriminative touch.

Tactile Defensiveness: The proclivity to react negatively and emotionally to the unexpected. Light touch sensations

Tactile Sense: The sensory system that receives pressure, vibration, movement, temperature, and pain sensations primarily through skin receptors.

Tracking: Using the eyes to follow a moving object or a line of print.

Vestibular: Refers to our body's sense of movement and the pull of gravity.

Vestibular Sense: The sensory system that responds to changes in head position and body movement through space, as well as coordinates eye, head, and body movements. The inner ear is made up of receptors. Differentiating between symbols and forms, such as matching or separating colors, shapes, numbers, letters, and words.

Visual Figure-Ground: Differentiation between foreground and background objects

Visual-Motor: Referring to one's movements as a result of visual information perception.

Visual Motor Skills: The ability to visually process information and coordinate your physical movement in relation to what has been seen. It requires both visual perception and motor coordination. Difficulties with visual motor skills can lead to inaccurate reaching, pointing, and grasping of objects, as well as copying, drawing, tracing, and cutting.

Visual-Perception: Perception and interpretation of what the eyes see

Visual Perceptual Skills: The ability to interpret and apply what one sees in their surroundings. Difficulties in this area can impede a child's ability to learn self-help skills such as tying shoelaces as well as academic tasks such as copying from the blackboard or finding items in a busy environment.

Visual-Spatial Processing Skills: Perceptions formed as a result of sensory information received through the eyes and body as one interacts with the environment and moves through space. Depth perception, directionality, form constancy, position in space, spatial awareness, visual discrimination, and visual figure-ground are all examples.