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How Do I Become an Occupational Therapist?

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? What Is an Occupational Therapist?

An Occupational Therapist (OT) is a healthcare professional who focuses on helping individuals live self-sufficient lives. These therapists work with people who have conditions that are mentally, physically, developmentally, or emotionally disabling—the focus is on important skills for daily activities, including those that happen in the home and those for recreation (Educational-Portal.com, n.d., ¶ 1). OTs also help people develop, recover, or maintain other daily living and work skills.

? What Does an Occupational Therapist Do in a School Setting?

In schools, occupational therapists help students succeed in daily routines including classroom, playground, lunchroom, and extracurricular activities. They do this through the development of study skills, self-care independence, problem-solving abilities, social skills, and career interests. Occupational therapy services help children develop positive habits and routines that support physical, intellectual, and emotional health and growth. Occupational therapists have specialized knowledge and skills in “social and emotional learning and regulation; task analysis, including sensory, motor, cognitive, and social components; assistive technology; and activity and environmental modifications” (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2009, ¶ 4).

Occupational therapists address the sensory needs of students as well as the aspects within the school environment that impact learning. They offer



direct services to individuals and small groups, as well as interventions for whole classrooms. They also offer consultation and collaboration with the entire school team, such as social workers, nurses, guidance counselors, and speech-language pathologists, to support a student's learning, daily living skills, play and leisure activities, and beginning work skills (AOTA, 2009, ¶ 7).

? What Are the Steps to Become an Occupational Therapist?

The minimum requirement for occupational therapy is earning a master's degree from an accredited institution. Some OTs earn a doctoral degree. Generally, the occupational therapy assistant will earn an associate degree. Practitioners must complete supervised clinical internships in a variety of health care settings and pass a national examination. Most states also regulate occupational therapy practice and require a license to provide services (AOTA (1), n.d., ¶ 1-3).

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? Where Do Occupational Therapists Work?

One of the greatest advantages of a career in occupational therapy is the wide variety of opportunities. Many occupational therapists



work in private and public schools with students who have learning disabilities and/or behavioral problems. OTs may also work in nursing homes, community centers, rehabilitation hospitals, or a client's home. In these settings, OTs help clients who have had a traumatic injury, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, or mental health problems learn to live productive lives through the use of meaningful and functional activities.

? Will I Have a Job?

Employment of occupational therapists is expected to increase much faster than the average for all occupations through 2031 Occupational Therapists. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Accessed 6/5/2023 from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/occupational-therapists.htm>—additionally, occupational therapy has been listed as one of the nation's 150 Best Recession-Proof Jobs (AOTA (2), n.d., ¶ 4). You can find more information about a career in occupational therapy at www.aota.org.

Resources:

- American Occupational Therapy Association (1). (n.d.). Occupational therapy: Fact sheets and articles. Retrieved October 12, 2009, from <https://www.aota.org/about/what-is-ot>
- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2009). Occupational therapy and school mental health. Retrieved October 12, 2009, from <http://www.aota.org/Consumers/WhatisOT/CY/Fact-Sheets/School-MH.aspx>
- American Occupational Therapy Association (2). (n.d.). Your career in occupational therapy – Consider becoming an occupational therapist. Retrieved October 12, 2009, from <http://www.aota.org/Students/Prospective/OT/38227.aspx>
- Educational-Portal.com. (n.d.). Occupational therapist: How do I become an occupational therapy professional. Retrieved October 12, 2009, from http://education-portal.com/articles/Occupational_Therapist%203A_How_Do_I_Become_an_Occupational_Therapy_Professional.html

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