

OPEN ARMS SUPPORT NEWSLETTER

An occupational therapy newsletter for schools, colleges, parents and carers



Open Arms Support Services (OASS) are an occupational therapy practice based in Norwich and we're really excited to introduce our first newsletter. We want to be able to share all the tips of the trade with everyone who needs them. We'll focus on a whole range of occupational therapy interventions and adaptations and try as much as possible to make sure that we cater for all types of functional challenges. Each term we'll create a new edition, so please feel free to get in touch if there is anything that you want us to cover.

Please share this newsletter with the families of your school and we really hope it is helpful.

From

The OASS team



ASK AN OT...

What is OT? I think my nan had one give her a loo seat once: OT's work in a range of settings and yes we do issue loo seats. We make changes to activities (hence the loo seat) and to the environment to keep people as independent as possible. Working with children means we help with well-being and mental health, accessing learning, movement, sensory processing, social skills - the list is pretty big because if the challenge affects being able to do things that are important, we can get involved.

My child is having an occupational therapy assessment, what should I expect? Generally speaking, your child should expect to spend time with an OT completing different activities depending on things like age, need and referral reason. *We try to make activities fun.* Sometimes tasks are standardised which means we can compare functioning to the broader population. Your child, you and other important adults such as teachers will be asked questions about the things the child likes, dislikes, finds easy and tricky.

I've heard people talking about eight sensory systems, is that true? It is. There's the five environmental senses (sight, sound, touch, smell and taste) and three internal systems that help us to know what our body is doing without us looking (proprioception) and how fast we're moving (vestibular). The final system is called interoception. This helps us to know what is going on in our body; are we hungry, thirsty, hot, cold etc? Interoception also affects our ability to notice physiological cues for emotions.



Open Arms Support
Services Presents

SEND Friendly Christmas

- Stories with Father Christmas
- Ella Therapy Dog Meet and Greet
- Sensory Activities
- Christmas Craft Activities
- Gift from Father Christmas

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FUN FACT!

Any time the head is laid flat for a while, for example, when children sit at their desks with their head on the table, or resting on their arms, a neural pathway called the Reticular Activating System kicks in. This is involved in inducing sleep. So in a head flat position, there's a good chance that the person is not fully focusing. Or, if going to sleep is tricky, encourage the person to spend time laying down before bedtime - maybe whilst reading.



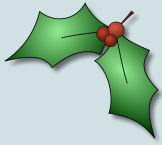
TIME TO SIGN.... 'Help'

We are very lucky at **OASS** to have staff who are trained in sign language and we would like to use our newsletter to share some signs that we hope are helpful (get it?!)



Put a closed fist, with your thumb up (made with your dominant hand) on top of the open palm of your non dominant hand and move both hands either towards your body for 'help me' or in the direction of another person if you are asking if they want help. Keep hands at about chest height.





STEP INTO CHRISTMAS (CALMLY!)



Christmas, in all its tinsley glory is simultaneously wonderful and exhausting! Nothing stays the same - the food is different, routines change, there's school plays to deal with, overwhelming sensory experiences and massive emotions. There is literally no respite! And it starts in November!! This is all great, if you're the kind of person that thrives on change, increased social interactions and who needs a lot of sensory stimulation but, if you're not (which, let's face it, is most of us), it can be quite stressful, so, here are our top tips to reduce dysregulation:

Planning and preparation is everything:

Reducing the unknown decreases stress. Try using **social stories** as part of the preparation.

Lunch is going to have different flavours and textures so try slowly introducing the different foods before the big day so that by the time Christmas lunch is served, all the foods are familiar.

Put the tree up in stages: move the furniture around first, then a few days later put the tree up and then gradually decorate it.

Access nature:

Research links nature to improved attention, better mood, increased levels of cooperation, and a decrease in the level of stress hormones and in levels of depression and anxiety. **Sounds of nature** alters our brain's connections, reducing our body's fight/flight reflex. **The colour green** is the most restful for our eyes and **when we're active**, our brains are flooded with feel good neurotransmitters. So try to spend as much time in nature as you can.

Have a no Christmas zone:

Somewhere so that when it all gets too much there is a place to escape to. If possible, keep this space quiet and low stimulation with a few relaxing activities available such as colouring (not Christmas pictures!), fidget toys or building blocks. Making these activities process rather than outcome orientated will make them more relaxing and you might want to consider offering calming sensory experiences such as cushion squashes, massages, vibrating toys, calming scents etc.



Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. We hope you have found the information useful and it helps to make a difference for the children and young people that you're working with and looking after.

Please do get in contact with us; we would love to hear feedback and any ideas that you would like to see in our next newsletter. Or, you may be interested in talking with one of us about how we can help support the children and young people in your provision.

Newsletter feedback and enquiries – please contact Ash Stokoe at a.stokoe@openarmsupport.co.uk

Enquiries on how we can provide support to children and schools you can:

- Contact Maria Cook, Business Manager, at m.cook@openarmsupport.co.uk
- Visit our website for more information on our service at www.openarmsupport.co.uk
 - Complete a contact form at www.openarmsupport.co.uk/contact