

# COMMON SIGNS DISPLAYED BY CHILDREN WHO BENEFIT FROM OT

BY ANAHITA DARWUALLA, MA, OTR/L  
PEDIATRIC OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

The following are some common signs of concerns that parents and teachers express and occupational therapist clinicians see that children experience. This is not intended to be an all inclusive list.

## SENSORY PROCESSING RELATED CONCERNS:

(Note sensory processing is the foundation to motor and learning development. The signs listed below can be related to sensory processing).

- Overly sensitive to noises (e.g. difficulty in loud places, sound of vacuum/blender/hair dryer), textures (e.g. feel of new clothes), movement (e.g. doesn't like swings/rides, fear of heights, doesn't like elevator/escalator).
- Under responsive to sensations (e.g. doesn't feel bruises/cuts, appears lethargic)
- Easily distracted by sounds and sights in their environment.
- Difficulty with coping skills (e.g. emotionally reactive, calming self when upset)
- Bumps/walks into stationary or moving objects (e.g. bumps into furniture, walks too close to moving swings).
- Coordination of the right and left sides of their body is not fluid or rhythmical (e.g. ride a bike, skipping, climbing, swimming, hold paper while writing/cutting).
- Difficulty with catching a ball thrown to their body or away from their body.
- Fidgety behaviors, frequently moving, or difficulty sitting still.
- Low energy.
- Hand dominance is inconsistent (e.g. child uses right hand for certain tasks, left hand for other tasks).

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## LEARNING RELATED INDICATORS:

- Writing is not legible (e.g. letter sizing too big, letters above/below bottom line, difficulty with spacing between words, difficulty copying from the board).
- Reading (e.g. reads slowly, skips words or sentences).
- Math (e.g. difficulty with one-to-one correspondence, lining up numbers to solve addition/subtraction problems).
- Easily distracted.
- Sustaining focus on what needs to be done is challenging.
- Difficulty completing work within the time allotted.
- Difficulty organizing materials inside desk, on desk, and in backpack (messy, loses things).
- Omits letters, words, sentences when copying information from the board.

## PLAY SKILLS RELATED SIGNS:

- Plays the same activity over and over again.
- Difficulty learning how to play new activities and games.
- Needs adult guidance to initiate playing activities (child does not engage in purposeful play on their own, walks around aimlessly).
- Plays briefly with one activity/toy and then switches to another.
- Finds it difficult to imitate other's demonstration (e.g. jump rope, hand gestures for songs).
- Difficulty copying a 2-D model (e.g. drawing) or 3-D model (e.g. Lego design).

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## SOCIAL PARTICIPATION RELATED CONCERNS:

- Stands too close or too far from others (difficulty with personal space)
- Difficulty waiting their turn.
- Not flexible with change in plans and routines.
- Difficulty transitioning to and participating in new environments.

## SELF-CARE SKILLS RELATED INDICATORS:

- Putting on or taking off their clothes.
- Knowing front and back, or left and right sides of clothing.
- Sensitivity to certain textures of clothing or tags on clothing.
- Difficulty learning how to open and close fasteners (e.g. buttons, zippers, shoe tying).
- Difficulty learning how to brush their own teeth, feed themselves, dress themselves.

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## GROSS MOTOR RELATED SIGNS:

- Climbing up and down stairs.
- Catching and throwing a ball.
- Kicking a ball.
- Playing on playground structures (explore different structures).
- Completing monkey bars.
- Walking on balance beam.
- Jump with 2 feet together.
- Hop of one foot (right and left).
- Riding a tricycle, bicycle, and scooter.
- Skip.
- Jump rope.

## FINE MOTOR RELATED CONCERNS:

- Difficulty with opening and closing clothing fasteners (e.g. buttons, snaps, zippers).
- Struggles to open and close food containers (e.g. ziploc bags, tupperware, sealed packages).
- Difficulty holding and using spoon and fork age appropriately.
- Avoids or dislikes games that require fine motor skills (e.g. Legos, Playdoh, Mancala, Operation, Lite Brite).
- Difficulty with using scissors age appropriately.
- Difficulty controlling writing tools (e.g. crayons, markers, pencils) age appropriately.

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## VISUAL MOTOR RELATED INDICATORS:

- Difficulty stacking blocks.
- Difficulty lacing (e.g. beads, shoe laces).
- Difficulty staying within the boundaries while coloring, completing mazes.
- Difficulty copying shapes or pictures with age appropriate accuracy (size and alignment).
- Difficulty completing puzzles.
- Difficulty writing with letters aligned between lines accurately.
- Decreased or increased space between letters and words.
- Inaccurate sizing of letters on printed lines.

## ORAL MOTOR RELATED SIGNS:

- Drooling.
- Picky eater (only wants to eat certain textures of foods - such as avoids or prefers soft foods, only wants crunchy foods or refuses to eat them).
- Difficulty chewing food thoroughly (e.g. child swallows larger pieces of food, coughs while eating).
- Spills food when trying to feed themselves with spoon and fork.
- Difficulty coordinating his arms to learn to use a knife.
- Spills liquids when drinking from a cup or straw.
- Language expressions delay (speaking).
- Doesn't realize when they are touched on the face or excessive food on face while eating.
- Overly sensitive to being touched on the face ).