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Your Therapy Source Digital Magazine December 2018

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10 COMMON PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICE

Inclusive education can provide wonderful opportunities for students with disabilities although research indicates that academic success and participation is limited. Recently, Child: Care, Health and Development published a review to look closely at the current evidence and determined 10 common principles to guide school-based practice and offer useful strategies for implementation of those principles in the school setting.

Research Review

Scholarly and grey literature in rehabilitation and education were reviewed collaboratively with school-based stakeholders. A search of five databases for research in rehabilitation and education identified 13,141 references and resulted in 56 relevant articles published from 1998 to 2017. Most of the studies focused on students with behavior issues, with little attention to physical or motor impairments.

Results of the Research Review

The school-based services (i.e. special education, psychology, speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, and personal support) primarily targeted students with behavioral issues, followed by those with cognitive and learning disabilities with a focus on improving social-emotional functioning and academic performance. The professionals that provided services included teachers/special education teachers (64%), rehabilitation specialists (36%), and medical staff (7%). Using thematic analysis, 10 common principles to guide school-based services were identified along with seven implementation strategies.

10 Common Principles to Guide School-Based Practice

The first four principles were described as the global organization of services and the last six principals involved specific service delivery.

1. multilevel services – building students’ capacities with whole-class instructional methods and interventions and changing specific interventions according to students’ individual needs.

2. Universal Design and Support – prevention programs mostly focused on behavioral management

3. collaborative intervention – between professionals at both the individual and organizational levels.

4. coordination of services – One person takes on a coordination role and helps to provide services in an organized and cohesive manner.

5. supports for school staff – providing support to school staff such as mentoring, coaching, consultation, and training.

6. direct group services

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7. direct individual services
8. pull-out therapy – students are removed from class to receive services individually or in a group.
9. services within the child’s natural environment – services provided in the child’s immediate natural environment, such as in the classroom, at home, and in the community.
10. family involvement – parents and family/caregivers are active team members working alongside various service providers.

The most common principal (39%) was direct, individualized services.

7 Strategies for Implementation of the Common Principles to Guide School-Based Practice

The research review revealed 7 strategies for implementation of the common principles to guide school-based practice:

1. Training.
2. Designating a coordination role.
3. Meetings.
4. Internal support.
5. Preparation.
6. External support.
7. Continuous evaluation.

The majority of the studies (71%) employed a single strategy and others combined 2 to 4 strategies.

Conclusion

The researchers concluded that these principals and strategies can help guide school-based practices although it was not determined if any principals were more effective than another. Future research should focus on comparing the effectiveness of the principals and include student, teacher, administrative and family-related outcomes.


Check out The Busy Therapist Bundle for over 100 handouts for parents, teachers, and students. The topics include fine motor, gross motor, executive functioning, handwriting, visual perceptual and sensory processing skills. Find out more here.

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SCHOOL-RELATED FINE MOTOR SKILLS – UNDERSTANDING THE COMPONENTS

When you search the internet, scour social media and review your textbooks, there are thousands of fine motor activities available to improve children’s fine motor skills. It can become completely overwhelming just to decide what activity to choose to help a specific child. It is important to understand the components of school-related fine motor skills. Just because there is a multitude of fine motor activities available for improving children’s fine motor skills in general, it doesn’t mean one size fits all. Certain fine motor activities are more suited to developing essential skills for school tasks such as handwriting. Ingrid S. King, MScOT, BOT, has created the Fantastic Fingers® Fine Motor Program which includes songs, games and extension activities specifically selected to achieve this purpose.

BONUS: Download a FREE hand out at the bottom of this post explaining why children needed to strengthen their muscles in order to write successfully.

Three Main Components of School-Related Fine Motor Skills

While acknowledging the complexity of children’s fine motor development (there are many contributing factors) you can focus on three main components of school-related fine motor skills:

1. strength
2. coordination
3. knowledge

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These three main components are the essential foundation upon which good fine motor manipulative and representational skills are built. When this foundation is not well consolidated, children struggle to perform fine motor tasks.

To relate these skills to young children, the Fantastic Fingers® Fine Motor Program names these three main components:

1. Mr. Muscles (strength)
2. Finger Fun (coordination)
3. My Mind (knowledge)

School-Related Fine Motor Skills – Strength

“Mr. Muscles” is the strength component of fine motor skills in the Fantastic Fingers® Fine Motor Program. In order for a child to perform a fine motor task with good coordination, the child first needs to have sufficient muscle strength in the relevant muscle groups and use the correct movement patterns.

In order to hold and write with a pencil, the child firstly needs a good upright seated posture to position their arms and hands optimally. This means that the muscles in their neck and trunk (stomach and back) must be strong. A child with weak neck and/or trunk muscles may lean heavily on the table or support their head in one hand. It is hard to write for any length of time when most of the child’s energy goes into just trying to sit up!

Secondly, the muscles within their shoulder girdle (shoulder blade and collarbone region), arm and hand need to be strong. In addition, the way their forearm, wrist, and fingers are positioned and moved is also important.

Before children are ready to write successfully, they need to have developed strength in the following muscle groups and use the correct biomechanics and movement patterns:

- Shoulder stability is the ability to contract (pull together) the muscles on either side of the shoulder girdle to hold the upper arm steady. This allows the arm to be held in different positions while the forearm and hand do an activity like writing.
- Shoulder control refers to the ability of the muscles on either side of the shoulder joint to relax gradually on one side while contracting on the other side. This allows the arm to move in a controlled and accurate way. Shoulder stability and control are important as they enable the child to place and hold their arms and hands in a good position for writing and other fine motor tasks.

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• Forearm position for writing is pronated (turned) so that the palm faces partially down. This helps to position the wrist back for writing. Two muscles in the forearm need to be strong to keep the forearm pronated.

• Wrist strength is important for keeping the wrist extended (held in a slightly bent back position) during pencil tasks. This bent back position helps to position the thumb, pointer and middle fingertips close together allowing for better control.

• Thumb and pointer finger control the pencil with small bending and stretching movements at the finger joints. Sufficient finger strength is important. The middle finger supports the pencil from the side and also moves somewhat.

BONUS: Download a FREE hand out at the bottom of this post explaining why children needed to strengthen their muscles in order to write successfully.

School-Related Fine Motor Skills – Coordination

The 5 areas that are related to coordination (aka Finger Fun), are:

• Kinaesthesia

• Tactile awareness

• Isolated finger movements

• Refined finger movements

• In-hand manipulation

Kinaesthesia

Kinaesthesia is the so-called ‘sixth sense’, telling the child where their body parts are positioned in space as well as the force and extent of their movements. The brain receives incoming information from receptors in their joints and muscles. Kinaesthesia is an internal body sense and does not involve vision. The tripod pencil grip allows the child to clearly see their pencil tip. It is important for younger children, whose sense of kinaesthesia is still developing, to be able to watch their pencil tip when forming letters.
Tactile or touch sensory awareness

Tactile or touch sensory awareness from receptors in the skin detect deep pressure, and light touch as well as pain and temperature. The ability to smoothly and evenly touch the tip of the thumb to the tip of each finger within the same hand has been found to be a significant predictor of handwriting ability (Berninger & Rutberg, 1992).

Good processing of information from receptors in the joints, muscles and skin of the hand will contribute to correct pencil grip and pressure, and also well controlled movement of the writing tool.

Isolated finger movements

Isolated finger movements occur when one finger (or parts of the finger) moves independently from the other fingers. Isolated finger movements are required for tasks like pointing, counting on one’s fingers and touch typing.
Refined finger movements

Refined finger movements are the small, precise movements of the thumb, pointer and middle fingers which occur during pencil tasks. For most children the tripod pencil grip places their first three fingers in the best position for optimal refined finger movements. Good refined finger movements together with efficient sensory processing (including the visual system) leads to good pencil control and an accurate, tidy end product.

In-hand manipulation

In-hand manipulation refers to the skilful repositioning of an object within the hand after it has been grasped. In-hand manipulation skills have been found to be a good predictor of handwriting ability (Cornhill & Case-Smith, 1996). This is because the pencil is manipulated several ways when writing: adjusting the pencil within the hand after picking it up and gripping it correctly before writing; subtly shifting the position of the fingers on the pencil shaft when writing; and sometimes rotating the pencil to use the eraser end. Mature in-hand manipulation skills allow for the pencil to be used with good control.

School-Related Fine Motor Skills – Knowledge Component

The knowledge component (“My Mind”) refers to the cognitive component that the child requires in order to do the fine motor task more efficiently and successfully. This requires the adult’s teaching input and the child’s attention and interest.

My Mind

The knowledge component in the My Mind activities occurs as the child learns:

- The identity and optimal use of their preferred and helping hands
- The number and names of their fingers
- How to hold and cut accurately with scissors
- How to hold and efficiently manipulate a pencil
- How to sit correctly when doing pencil and paper tasks
- How to work from top to bottom and left to right (directionality)
Fantastic Fingers® Handwriting Foundations Screen

How do you assess if a child is making progress in foundational skill areas to support handwriting performance? How do you determine if further intervention is required? Ingrid S. King MScOT, BOT developed the Fantastic Fingers® Handwriting Foundations Screen to identify handwriting needs fast and monitor progress.

Fantastic Fingers® Fine Motor Program is a comprehensive fine motor program that includes ebook, music, and instructional videos. It’s user-friendly, research-based, and improves children’s fine motor skills, pencil grip, posture and more. It also integrates many early literacy and numeracy skills.

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HOW TO HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP SENSORY STRATEGIES THAT WORK

For many students with sensory processing disorder, it is of utmost importance to determine how to help students develop sensory strategies that work to function more efficiently at school. Of course, there are some students who are not able to express their needs and observational skills and data collection are critical. Regardless, all students should be encouraged to express their sensory needs in order to have functional outcomes. You can download two FREE worksheets to help guide this process at the bottom of the post.

Step 1: Identify the Challenge

Work with the student to identify what the current challenge is during their school day. Perhaps they are having difficulties with personal space boundaries, staying focused during classwork, or self-regulation.

Create a list of challenges that the student faces in school. Ask the student to help prioritize which ones are most difficult and start to tackle that issue first.

Step 2: Discuss Solutions

Discuss solutions with the student. Provide the student with questions to prompt creating sensory solutions if necessary such as:

- what are you doing before you have a challenging situation?
- have you noticed anything that makes the challenge easier to deal with?
- have you noticed anything that makes the challenge harder to deal with?
- in a perfect situation, how would you deal with overcoming the challenge?

Provide the student with visual supports if necessary to help students develop sensory strategies that work for them.

If a student is unsure of their sensory preferences, be sure to help educate and guide them on activities or environmental changes that may be beneficial. The Sensory Mini Books and charts offer a child-centered approach to establishing a child’s sensory preferences and dislikes. The books can help children to develop their own coping strategies along with the child’s parents, therapists, and teachers. This tool is an excellent resource for non-verbal children as well as verbal children.

Their responses can help determine what sensory solutions may be helpful. Keep in mind not only solutions will be sensory based. Some require more behavioral interventions to produce functional outcomes. Most require a combination of the two (sensory + behavioral) since it is very hard to separate the two.

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Step 3: Formulate a Plan

Work with the student to establish how to apply the solutions throughout the school day. What sensory strategies can be utilized before, during and after the challenge that they are trying to overcome?

Try using something like this Sensory Fill In Worksheet to provide a visual to the student to help them improve their educational outcomes. Download the blank template at the bottom of the post.

You can use visual supports or simply write in what strategies will be tried during the day.

Step #4: Put the Plan into Action

Next, put the plan into action. The student can try the different sensory strategies to improve their functional outcomes.

It may be helpful to introduce one or two strategies at a time to determine if they are effective or not.

Step #5: Reflect and Revisit

Sensory needs and strategies are constantly changing. Students may adapt to certain input over time or their sensory needs change. It is important to constantly reflect on what is working and revisit whether other strategies would be more successful or the current strategies need to be tweaked.

Reflection needs to include data collection. Students can use self-generated data collection, or staff can observe outcomes and collect data. Regardless, without some form of data it is difficult to determine what strategies yield the best results. If sensory strategies are used ineffectively, that can hinder educational outcomes.

Download the Sensory Fill In Worksheets and Handouts

More Sensory Resources

The Sensory Strategies for the Classroom Bundle includes 9 digital downloads to help students to be ready to learn or participate in functional tasks.

The Sensory Lifestyle Handbook (digital download) is your strategy guide for turning sensory diets and sensory activities into a sensory lifestyle. Written by Occupational Therapist, Colleen Beck, The Sensory Lifestyle Handbook includes a 133 page PDF document filled with information on the sensory system and the whole child, sensory diets and how to create a lifestyle for sensory success. This book is suitable for therapists, parents, teachers or anyone who wants to help children with their sensory needs.

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JUST AS WE SUSPECTED...

Pediatric therapists are frequently quoted as saying young children’s motor skills are declining. Little ones enter school age with decreased fine motor and gross motor skills. We say “based on my experiences” or “in my clinical opinion” children’s motor skills are suffering. There is speculation that it is due to “bucket baby syndrome” – too much time in devices as babies and not enough floor time and too much screen time. Well, with sadness I just finished reading some research that confirms what we suspected. Gross motor skill development is lagging behind.

Decline in Gross Motor Skills in Toddlers

The *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* published research on 335 children (ages 11-29 months old) from 30 different childcare centers in Australia. Each child was evaluated with the Peabody Developmental Motor Scales-Second Edition using the gross motor quotient for locomotor skills, object manipulation, and stationary sub-tests. Socioeconomic information was also collected.

Data analysis indicated the following:

- 23.3% of the children scored below average for the gross motor quotient.
- for the gross motor skills subtests:
  - 34.3% of children scored below average for locomotion
  - 10.1% for object manipulation.
  - 0.3% for stationary.
- Boys were more proficient in object manipulation than girls.
• there was a negative association for gross motor skills between age and a higher socioeconomic status.

• there were no associations for BMI.

What about Preschoolers?

In a different study of 330 Australian children in 60 different preschools also indicated a decline in normal motor skill development where almost 75% of the children could run but locomotor skills were lower for other skills such as the gallop (31% mastered), hop (25%), jump (22%), strike (14%), catch (20%), kick (35%), and throw (16%).

Conclusion

The researchers concluded that due to the prevalence of below average locomotor skills in toddlers gross motor skills should be encouraged early on focusing on locomotor skills and girls’ object manipulation skills.

Commentary

In my personal opinion, I am not surprised to read the results of this study regarding the decline in normal gross motor skill development. What I am surprised to find is that only 0.3% scored below average in the stationary subtests. My hypothesis would have been that the stationary subtest was just as low as the locomotor skills since children need postural control and balance skills to complete locomotor skills. After reading the results of this study, I have new questions:

• Are children’s gross motor skills slower to develop due to lack of practice and not decreased postural control?

• Why are girl’s object manipulation skills slower to develop? Lack of practice as well?

• This study used subjects starting at 11 months, would the results have been even lower if it started at 10 months old where creeping would have been the first locomotor skill to be examined?

• Has a study like this been done in the United States? The PDMS – 2nd edition was published in 2000 well before the smartphone was introduced to little ones...

• Has a study like this been done on fine motor skill development? I speculate the results would be worse...

This is one area where I wish we were proven wrong. That all of our speculations were just what we were observing. But it appears that our children are slowing in their development of gross motor
skills. This has the potential to have very long-term effects on the health and well being of our children and future society as a whole. As pediatric therapists it is our job to continue to educate parents, family members, caregivers, and teachers on the importance of safe floor play for little ones and increasing physical activity time.

Reference


Need activities to encourage motor skill development in young children?

**Play – Move – Develop:** 100 reproducible games and activity ideas to encourage motor skill development and learning in children. A great resource for fun, home exercise program activities.

**Therapeutic Play Activities for Children** digital download includes 100 play activity pages and 12 tip sheets. The play activities encourage the development of fine motor skills, bimanual skills, rolling, crawling, tall kneeling, standing balance and cruising with a strong focus on children with cerebral palsy. [FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION.](www.YourTherapySource.com)
TAI CHI FOR BEGINNERS YOUNG AND OLD

Do you want to learn all about Tai Chi for beginners? Tai Chi focuses on specific postures which work to enhance energy flow throughout the body. It releases stress both in the mind and throughout the body and helps to improve the smoothness and flexibility within the joints. All ages can benefit from the practice of Tai Chi.

Energy Flow and Tai Chi for Beginners

Are you tired of being tired? If you work with children, then you know how exhausting it can be. Whether you are a tired student, parent, or professional, Tai Chi could be just what you need to feel more energized.

Think of a day when you were overly stressed. Perhaps a student that you work with is going through a particularly tough time, or lawyers are involved at an IEP meeting or your child is sick at home. Whatever it may be, being stressed and tense, can knock the body’s energy flow out of sync. This in turn can cause fatigue, stiffness and even depression.

Improving the flow of energy within the body can bring numerous health benefits, as well as ensure you feel more awake and relaxed. Here, you’ll discover how Tai Chi can help to improve your flow of energy and why it matters.

Tai Chi for Children

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Understanding the body’s natural energy

Did you know your body has its own natural, unique energy flow? Without even being aware of it, your body constantly has energy flowing throughout, helping to keep you happy and healthy.

However, sometimes this energy flow can be interrupted or damaged in some way, leaving you feeling fatigued and potentially leading to numerous health issues.

Stress and tension tend to be the biggest natural energy drain on the body. When you’re stressed, the muscles tend to tense up. So, rather than nice, relaxing energy flowing through the body, instead it starts to flow with insecurities and fear. Keeping the body relaxed and healthy is, therefore, key to maintaining your body’s natural positive energy flow.

How can Learning Tai Chi for Beginners help?

Tai Chi is one of the best practices you can partake in to optimize your body’s natural energy flow. Even its name gives you an indication of how energy focused it actually is.

Chi is the name given to the body’s natural harmony and energy flow. Tai Chi focuses on specific postures which work to enhance energy flow throughout the body. It releases stress both in the mind and throughout the body and helps to improve the smoothness and flexibility within the joints.

Most importantly, it focuses upon what is known as the chi power center. Otherwise referred to as the “Tantien”, it’s basically the body’s gravity center. It acts as a chi pump, sending the energy to different parts of the body. It functions much in the same way as the heart does to pump blood around the body, only it focuses on energy.

How will children benefit from Tai Chi?

Since tai chi is low impact with gentle motions it is easily adapted for all types of children including those with physical disabilities. Many of the movements can be performed in a seated position. The movement patterns can be adapted so that all can participate at their own level.

Children with sensory processing difficulties will be challenged to grade their movements and maintain focus on the activity.

Children who have ADHD can benefit also from the grading of movements, the concentration of deep breathing and the meditation component to calm the mind.

Children who have motor planning deficits can work on following the motions at a slow and controlled pace.

Tai Chi for Children

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Anxious children will benefit from the stress reduction effects of tai chi.

Since Tai Chi can help to calm the mind, improve concentration, increase mental alertness, reduce anxiety, increase circulation, reduce tension and lower blood pressure and heart rate all children can benefit from this practice.

**How long does it take to see results?**

You’re not going to notice an instant energy boost with Tai Chi. Like most things, it takes time to develop the true benefits of the practice. However, that isn’t to say you won’t feel any benefits right away.

After one first session, you and the children should feel more relaxed and calmer. This in itself is a pretty awesome benefit! Then, the more you become used to the practice, the more benefits it will start to deliver.

Absolutely every Tai Chi movement is designed to deliver energy to the body. So, there are no specific movements you should be concentrating on if you’re looking to boost your energy levels. Initially, you’ll start by learning more about how your body’s movements are linked to your energy levels.

As you and the children advance through the practice, you’ll start to find it easier to actually recognize your chi, or natural energy flow. This, in turn, will show you how you can alter it if needed.

Tai Chi enables you to channel energy anywhere you need to. However, mostly it’s best to let your chi go wherever it needs to. The body has a pretty amazing ability to send energy wherever it’s needed most. Often, energy isn’t required where you initially think it is.

While it may not look particularly challenging, Tai Chi is one of the best exercises you can do for your BODY and MIND.

**Little Known Facts About Tai Chi – And Why They Matter**

Tai Chi is a renowned Chinese martial art, known for its slow, flowing movements. It aims to promote inner calm and peace but it actually provides far more benefits than most people realize.

**It can boost energy levels**

Did you know Tai Chi has the power to significantly boost your energy levels? As it’s a slow moving physical exercise, energy isn’t something you’d typically associate it with. However, it works to enhance energy levels in numerous ways.

By focusing on correct body alignment, strengthening the nerves and reducing stress placed onto the heart, Tai Chi helps to boost your energy level.

**Tai Chi for Beginners – Head Outdoors!**

Have you ever noticed that most Tai Chi classes are taught outdoors? Well, there’s actually a reason for that. When you’re outdoors, there can be more distractions to contend with. This means you’re going
to need to work extra hard to concentrate on the practice. Over time, this really helps to build up your discipline and ability to drown out outside noise.

Another reason it's done outdoors is that it helps you to appreciate nature. Tai Chi is all about finding your inner calm and being at one with the environment. Practicing outdoors is said to connect the spirit to the planet, which in turn provides numerous benefits such as more radiant skin. You'll learn how to use your body and mind as a whole. Tai Chi is a very coordinated practice. Through consistent slow, coordinated movements, it helps to really bring balance to the body and mind.

Tai Chi for Beginners – Mental Health Benefits

This is actually something many of us could benefit from these days. How often do the children you work with and you spend feeling stressed out, depressed or anxious?

Mental illness is a very common issue in today's society, yet practices such as Tai Chi could be really beneficial at reducing the symptoms. As your mind and body become more aligned, you'll start to feel calmer and a lot more in control of your life.

It's Not Easy

It's not easy. From the outside, Tai Chi looks like a relatively easy, non-challenging practice. However, nothing could be further than the truth. Sure, it's slow and it can hardly be considered an intense cardio workout. However, that definitely doesn't mean it's easy.

Those who haven't exercised in a long time, or those who may be suffering from any type of physical limitation, may find it pretty tough to get into. However, if you're up for the challenge, Tai Chi can definitely be learned by all ages and abilities.

How to Find Your Tai Chi Energy Flow

There are a lot of relaxation techniques you can try out. Deep breathing and mediation are both highly recommended as part of Tai Chi practice. Once you start identifying the tenseness within the body, it will become much easier to release it whenever you need to.

If you're trying out meditation, you may find you struggle at first to block out all other noise and intrusive thoughts. However, with regular practice, you'll develop a much greater ability to control your thoughts and relax the mind.

Focus on your breathing

Breathing is another key element of Tai Chi. In order to be able to focus on your breathing techniques, you need to ensure you're comfortable. Once you've got yourself comfortable, start by taking a deep breath in, then a deep breath out.

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Try to focus solely on the breath. Follow it as it enters through the nose, down the back of the throat, into the lungs and finally down into your stomach. Then, follow it as you exhale, from the stomach, up to the lungs, up the throat and out through the nose. Taking a few deep breaths using this technique, will automatically relax the mind and body, helping you to connect with your inner energy.

**Take a Tai Chi class**

If you’re just starting out with Tai Chi and you want to teach it to the children, you may struggle to understand or follow the tips to get in tune with your energy flow. For that reason, it often helps to take an actual Tai Chi class, check out videos on You Tube or read Tai Chi for Children.

You’ll be able to gain valuable tips and advice on how to correctly follow the principles of Tai Chi.

**Develop correct posture**

Along with breathing and relaxation, the right posture can also make a massive difference to how energized you feel. You may have heard that many successful people take on a “power stance” whenever they need to feel powerful and confident. Surprisingly, it works!

One of the key principles of Tai Chi is correct body alignment. You can explain to the children that it helps with their posture and how they carry their body. Many people don’t realize just how important correct body alignment is for their energy levels.

So, how exactly does readjusting your body’s alignment boost your energy?

When the body is correctly aligned, it enables the muscles to work much more efficiently. This means the body doesn’t need to use as much energy, greatly reducing muscle fatigue.

It’s also possible that poor posture can compress the diaphragm and place restriction onto the rib cage. This can reduce lung capacity, leading to breathing trouble, along with reduced energy.

Tai Chi focuses on developing correct body alignment. Using the correct posture enables the body to relax and generate lots of positive energy.

**Start small!**

Finally, to find your Tai Chi energy flow, it’s important to start meditation slowly. It’s common to think just because Tai Chi is a slow and somewhat gentle practice, you don’t really need to ease yourself into it.

However, in order to become better at the practice and control your flow of energy, you will need to start off slowly. For example, start with just 5 minutes of Tai Chi each day. You can work your way up to doing more.

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As you do increase the time you spend doing it, you’ll find you start to develop more energy throughout the body.

Interested to find out more?

Tai Chi for Children includes a delightfully illustrated story for children with all abilities: It describes the history of Tai Chi and some basic principles and movement patterns (from Tai Chi Fundamentals®) in a way that children can understand. It could be read to teens or adults with intellectual or other challenges as well. This storybook is for every parent, teacher, child, therapist, physician, grandmother, or person who wants to learn more about Tai Chi or may want to inspire a child to try this form of physical activity. Also included is background information on Tai Chi, the 12 movements of Tai Chi (with full-page illustrations), guidelines which include the key components of each movement, benefits and simple verbal cues for seated and standing positions, student feedback scale and student practice chart. FIND OUT MORE.

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Are you looking for a cute, unicorn fine motor activity that is free? Well, look no further! This freebie includes the Color, Cut and Glue Unicorn Fine Motor Activity. You can download it at the bottom of the post.

**How to Complete the Unicorn Activity**

For preparation, all you have to do is print the page. Provide the students with crayons, scissors and glue.

Step 1: Color the unicorn.

Step 2: Cut out the unicorn pieces.

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Step 3: Glue the unicorn together using the picture as a model.

Looking for more unicorn fine motor activities?

This freebie is from the Unicorn Writing Pack. This bundle deal will add some magic to your handwriting and fine motor skill practice sessions. It includes 2 creative packs for Unicorn lovers. The Unicorn Writing Activities and Unicorn Writing Paper consist of one 20 page PDF packet with 5 craftivities and one 6 page unicorn writing paper pack.

Download your FREE Unicorn Fine Motor Activity

Don’t forget to check out the complete Unicorn Sensory Motor Pack for more super fun sensory motor activities with a unicorn theme.

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A systemic review and meta-analysis were recently completed on improving self-regulation skills for all students. There is an increasing amount of evidence supports the positive associations of self-regulation skills with health, social and educational outcomes.

Information about the Study on Self-Regulation

*JAMA Pediatrics* completed a systematic review and meta-analysis of rigorously evaluated interventions through July 2016 to improve self-regulation in children and adolescents. In order to be included in the review the studies had to be randomized trials, evaluate universal interventions designed to improve self-regulation in children and adolescents aged 0 to 19 years, include outcomes associated with self-regulation skills, and be published in a peer-reviewed journal with the full text available in English. In total, 49 studies were included for full-text review reporting 50 interventions.

Results of the Research Review on Improving Self-Regulation Skills for All Students

The results of the *JAMA Pediatrics* research review on improving self-regulation skills for all students included a total of 23,098 participants ranging in age from 2 to 17 years (median age, 6.0 years). The study indicated that consistent improvement in self-regulation was reported in:

- 16 of 21 of the curriculum-based interventions.
- 4 of the 8 mindfulness and yoga interventions (school-based interventions lasting 6 months or less)
- 5 of 9 family-based programs.
- 4 of 6 exercise-based programs (i.e. high-intensity interval training, martial arts, team games, etc.)
- 4 of 6 social and personal skills interventions.

Additional Positive Outcomes of Self-Regulation Interventions

Additional positive outcomes of self-regulation interventions were reported in the following areas:

- 11 of 13 studies (85%) on academic achievement.
- 4 of 5 studies on substance abuse (80%).
- 9 of 9 studies reporting on conduct disorders, studies on social skills, studies on depression, studies on behavioral problems, and study on school suspensions.

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No effect was seen on 2 studies reporting on academic achievement, 1 study reporting on substance abuse, and 1 additional study reporting on psychological well-being.

Conclusion on Improving Self-Regulation Skills for All Students

The researchers concluded that there is a wide range of interventions to help with improving self-regulation skills in children and adolescents. Improvements were noted in academic, health, and behavioral outcomes in most intervention groups compared with controls.


If you need help teaching self-regulation skills to children, get more information on this Self Regulation Skills Curriculum.

Self-Regulation Skills Taught: This curriculum provides an effective, time-efficient structured system to provide classroom breaks, improve self-awareness and self-advocacy and teach specific self-regulation skills so that kids have tools to use in their classrooms. This system will get kids moving, give them the benefits of a brainpower boost [from getting their heart rate up], give them heavy work and isometrics to help them calm down, and help them learn techniques to quiet and control their bodies in order to return to their academic work. FIND OUT MORE.

Read more on Self-Regulation Skills

Key Components of Effective Interventions for Self-Regulation

Self-Regulation and Early Writing Skills

Practice Self-Regulation Skills with Visual Supports and Games

The Ultimate Guide to Self-Regulation in Children

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Do you work with students who have a difficult time crossing midline? Perhaps they experience visual spatial issues? These crossing midline exercises can not only help children crossing from left to right or right to left, they also encourage bilateral coordination skills, balance and strengthening.

**Crossing Midline Exercises #1 – Side bends**

You can perform this exercise in standing or sitting. Place left hand over your head and bend your trunk slightly to the right. Hold for 3 seconds. Switch and place your right hand over your head and bend your trunk slightly to the left. Hold for 3 seconds. Repeat 10 times to each side.

**Crossing Midline Exercises #2 – Lunges**

Place the left foot to the left side, place BOTH of your hands on the left knee and bend the knee to about 90 degrees. Hold for 3 seconds. Repeat 10 times to the left. Perform on the right side 10 times.

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Crossing Midline Exercise #3 – Twists

For this exercise, the child stands up (or you can do in sitting). Gently place both hands behind the head. Without pulling on the head and neck, bring the left elbow to the right knee and back up to upright standing. Then bring the right elbow to the left knee and back up to upright standing. Repeat for a count of 10 to each side.

Crossing Midline Exercises #4 – Windmills

Most children are familiar with windmills from physical education class. Stand up tall and bring your right hand to the left foot. Return to upright standing. Then bring your left hand to the right foot. Return to upright standing. Repeat 10 times to each side.

Crossing Midlines Exercises #5 – Bicycle

This is another exercises that many children will be familiar with from gym class. Laying down on the floor, gently place your hands behind your head. Bring the left elbow to the right knee and put your head back on the mat. Then bring your right elbow to the left knee. Put your head back on the mat. Repeat 10 times to each side. DO NOT pull on your head and neck. Your hands are just supporting your head.
25+ Bilateral Coordination Exercises is a collection of bilateral coordination exercise sheets including QR codes with links to the video demonstration of exercises. A QR code is a black and white image with squares, that stores website links for reading by the camera on a smartphone. Each exercise page includes picture images and step by step directions of a whole body bilateral coordination exercise. Also included, is a link to a You Tube video with a demonstration of the exercise along with a slow motion video of the exercise. Parents, students or teachers can simply use a QR code reader app on their smart phone or tablet to go directly to the video demonstration.

These activities encourage bilateral coordination, motor timing, motor planning, muscle strengthening and balance skills. FIND OUT MORE.

DOWNLOAD YOUR FREE COPY OF ALL 5 CROSSING MIDLINE EXERCISES
FINISH THE PICTURE PRINTABLES

Do you need an activity to practice symmetry, visual motor and visual closure skills? These cat finish the picture printables are FREE (download at the end of the post). It includes three levels of difficulty:

1. **Level One** – Trace along the dotted lines to complete the other half of the picture.
2. **Level Two** – Complete the missing parts of the other half of the picture.
3. **Level Three** – Finish the missing half of the picture.

**What is visual closure?**

Visual closure is a visual perceptual skill that allows you to know what an object is even when the object is only partially visible. For example, if your sock is sticking out from under your bed you recognize it is your missing sock. Another example is reading words together instead of every letter at a time. This freebie has the children practice visual closure skills by complete the other half of the symmetrical picture.

This [Shape Owls](https://www.YourTherapySource.com) digital download packet includes 10 different owl shapes with 3 levels of difficulty to practice shape discrimination, visual closure, and handwriting skills.

**What are visual motor skills?**

Coordinating your eyes and hands to draw and write are visual motor skills. Students need visual motor skills to perform actions such as drawing pictures, writing letters and catching a ball. These finish the picture printables work on practicing visual motor skills because the child has to trace or draw to complete the symmetrical picture.

Download your FREE Finish the Picture Printables here

This freebie is from the full [Complete the Picture digital download](https://www.YourTherapySource.com). It includes 25 exercises with three levels of difficulty to practice symmetry, visual motor, and visual closure skills.

[www.YourTherapySource.com](https://www.YourTherapySource.com)
VESTIBULAR EXERCISE PROGRAM HELPS INCREASE BALANCE AND AGILITY

The American Journal of Psychiatry and Neuroscience published research on 17 children with Down Syndrome (DS) to determine the effect of a vestibular exercise program on balance, coordination, and agility.

Methodology

The 17 children were recruited from two summer enrichment programs and were divided into two groups based on age (group 1: 9.9 yrs – group 2: 18.4 yrs.).

Each participant was evaluated with the Bruininks Oseretsky Test of Motor Proficiency 2 subtests for balance, bilateral and upper limb coordination, and agility prior to and after six weeks of 2 times per week vestibular stimulation exercises.

The vestibular exercises included an exercise maze that was developed to provide vestibular stimulation exercises in a fun atmosphere. There were 15 activities in the maze that included components such as balance, coordination, muscular strengthening, flexibility, and cardiovascular endurance.

Results of the Study on Vestibular Exercise Program

Both age groups showed improvement in upper limb coordination and agility. The older children demonstrated improvement in one of the balance subtests. The researchers concluded that a vestibular stimulation exercise program could increase balance and agility in children with DS and possibly assist in increasing their functional ability.


Classroom Activity Posters is a download collection of 16 exercise activities, 4 large posters and a brief, simple video demonstration of each exercise. The posters are divided into four groups: posture, alerting, ready to work and focus/balance. All of the exercises are performed in standing. Try these activities prior to starting fine motor activities, for posture breaks, to refocus students attention and for vestibular/proprioceptive input in the classroom. Find out more information.

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KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS NEED MORE HELP FOR HANDWRITING INSTRUCTION

Do you get frustrated when you see young children have poor letter formation? Does it bother you when teachers don’t take the time for handwriting instruction? New research indicates that kindergarten teachers need more help for handwriting instruction. They would agree that they need more support in the area of handwriting.

Methodology of the Study on Kindergarten Teachers and Handwriting Instruction

A phenomenological research design (first person point of view) was used and nine kindergarten teachers employed at four elementary schools participated in semi-structured interviews. The perceptions of teachers related to challenges they face and the support they require in promoting the occupational task of handwriting among the children in their classrooms was discussed.

Results of the Study Kindergarten Teachers and Handwriting Instruction

The researchers found that overall the teachers felt that the lack of a curriculum and formalized training influenced their teaching practices related to handwriting instruction.

The teachers stated that there was a lack of knowledge relating to the following:

- developmental progression.
- the ability to assist struggling students.
- an awareness of strategies to use.
- IEP process.

All of these factors contributed to the challenges of kindergarten teachers and handwriting instruction.

School-based occupational therapy providers can sometimes feel frustrated or overwhelmed with handwriting referrals. This study indicates that teachers need your help to educate them on the developmental progression of handwriting, instructional strategies and tips for students who struggle.


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This Handwriting Bundle for PreK-5th Graders is created by school-based Occupational Therapist, Thia Triggs of Print Path. This Handwriting Without Tears®-style letter font, uses 3-lines to best support your students. There are Go-Dots, Gray-Boxes, and Simple Arrows that inform rather than confuse learners. Best practices include research-based methods incorporating application of developmental and motor learning theories to benefit your struggling learners. Includes Teacher Guides!

The Handwriting Station Bundle Deal will save you TONS of time with these NO-PREP activities that encourage handwriting practice for your students. Set up a handwriting station in the classroom or at home so students can practice handwriting throughout the day in the classroom. Great for early finishers!
BENEFITS OF STRUCTURED BIMANUAL SKILL PRACTICE

*Research in Developmental Disabilities* published research on the benefits of structured bimanual skill practice. Twenty children with unilateral spastic cerebral palsy (CP) participated in the study in order to determine the importance of skill progression during intensive bimanual practice on movement coordination.

**Methodology of the Study on the Benefits of Structured Bimanual Skill Practice**

The 20 children with unilateral CP were randomly allocated to a structured practice group with skill progression (10 children) or to an unstructured practice group without skill progression (10 children). Both groups participated in bimanual activities 6 hours a day for 15 days. Pre and post testing was completed where children performed a bimanual drawer-opening task using 3-D kinematic analyses.

**Results of the Study on the Benefits of Structured Bimanual Skill Practice**

The results of the study indicated the following:

- both groups showed improved temporal bimanual coordination with increased normalized movement overlap of the two hands.
- both groups showed decreased goal synchronization time.
- only the structured practice group showed decreased trunk involvement and increased elbow joint excursion with decreased variability.

**Conclusion**

The researchers concluded that structured skill progression is important for intensive practice to improve trunk and arm control for children with unilateral CP.

**Reference:**


Therapeutic Play Activities for Children digital download includes 100 play activity pages and 12 tip sheets. The play activities encourage the development of fine motor skills, bimanual skills, rolling, crawling, tall kneeling, standing balance and cruising with a strong focus on children with cerebral palsy. FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION.

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PRACTICE FOLLOWING ORAL AND WRITTEN DIRECTIONS – FREE ACTIVITIES

Do you work with students who need to practice following oral and written directions? This FREEBIE includes 4 sample activities from the Following Directions Bundle.

Each of the activity pages requires the students to follow oral and written directions such as:

1. What am I? – 2 activity pages
2. Following Directions and Drawing
3. Follow Directions to Get Through the Maze

Strengthen Cognition

These free practice activities will strengthen the following areas of cognition:

- Language Skills
- Sequential Processing
- Spatial Abilities
- Memory
- Attention
- Executive Functioning
- Attention to Detail
- Visual Processing

Get more details on the complete Following Directions Bundle here. The Following Directions Bundle helps students master the subtleties of linguistic cues and also helps to develop spatial, sequential, memory, attentional and executive functioning skills.

DOWNLOAD YOUR FREE ACTIVITY PAGE HERE FROM THE FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS BUNDLE

More products created by Dr. Erica Warren:

Reversing Reversals

Working Memory, Hemisphere Integration and Attention Building Bundle

Planning, Time Management, and Organization Skills Bundle

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How to Help a Child with Anxiety in the Classroom

Do you work with children who are anxious at school or at home? Learn how to help a child with anxiety in the classroom with these 10 interventions. Parents and teachers can be part of the support system for a child who experiences anxiety.

How to Help a Child with Anxiety in the Classroom – 10 Effective Strategies

Many children experience anxiety in the classroom or at home. When teachers and parents are aware and trained in providing various interventions, you can take a proactive approach to managing anxiety. Here is 10 suggestions of how to help a child with anxiety in the classroom:

1. Talking/explaining: discuss and explain the situation to the child
2. Distraction
3. Visual Schedules – let the child know what is coming next and how many steps there are by using visual schedule boards
4. Reassurance – offer reinforcement that all will be okay
5. Physical activities – aerobic exercises, yoga, in class brain breaks and recess
6. Relaxation Techniques – try deep breathing, self-calming activities, etc.
7. Quiet time – create an area in the classroom where the child can have quiet time if needed
8. Cuddling – parents can provide cuddle time at home or children can cuddle a stuffed animal in the quite space area in the classroom.
9. Have fun – try playing a game or other types of fun activities to reduce anxiety.

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10. Grading anxiety – when children learn how to grade their anxiety it can help with self-regulation and self-management. Try using a visual to grade anxiety levels.

Read more about Anxiety in Children

3 Strategies to Help Children with Anxiety

How to Use Yoga to Reduce Anxiety in Children

Sleep, Bedtime Routines, Anxiety, and Autism

Sensory modulation, anxiety and ritual behaviors

6 Tips to Decrease Anxiety when Writing


Visual Supports: Schedules, Self-Regulation, & Classroom Inclusion

Designed by a school based occupational therapist, Thia Triggs, this color coded visual support system is suitable for your children with autism, emotional behavioral disturbance, intellectual disabilities, ADHD, communication disabilities, and more. Pictures are cute, engaging, and easy for children to understand.

Visual supports for self-regulation can be pivotal in implementing an IEP in the least restrictive environment. This digital download includes 283 visuals. FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION.
Finally, we are posted the results of the survey on related services and section 504 plans. For some reason, we forgot about this one. The good news is there were 343 responses and trends that were recorded. The bad news is many people answered text responses under the OTHER option so the results were a bit scattered.

Please take a moment when done, to answer our current survey.

Results for Question #1 on Related Services and Section 504 Plans: What is your job title?

Here are the results of question #1 – what is your job title?

- 56.9% were OTs
- 20.1% were PTs
- 11.7% were COTAs
• 2.3% were counselors
• 1.5% were Speech Language Pathologists
• the rest were all less than 1%

Results for Question #2 on Related Services and Section 504 Plans:
Do you provide related services to students with a Section 504 plan only?

Here are the results for question #2 – Do you provide related services to students with a Section 504 plan only?

The responses were as follows:

• 58.7% Yes, I provide related services to students with 504 plans only.
• 18.6% No, I do not provide services to any students without IEPs.
• 5.8% Yes, but the student receives related services under building level support not the 504 plan.
• The remaining 16.9% of the responses were other.

Read more about Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act at the US Department of Education website.

Answer the Current Survey

Please take a moment to answer the current survey. Thank you in advance.
Resources for modifications and interventions at school for students with 504 plans

**Modifications and Interventions for School – Reporting Forms**

This book, in printed or electronic format, provides pediatric therapists with over 60, reproducible reporting forms with hundreds of suggested modifications and interventions for students. Track progress once modifications are put into action. [Find out more information.](#)

**Resource Guides for Students with Written Output Disorders**

Read more on school based therapy

10 COMMON PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICE

PROVIDING RELATED SERVICES TO HOMEBOUND STUDENTS SURVEY RESULTS

WERE YOU ADEQUATELY PREPARED TO PROVIDE SCHOOL-BASED THERAPY SERVICES?

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