



Occupational Therapy & Mental Health

Renfrew OTs Working in Mental Health Classrooms

Through the Student Health partnership, Renfrew Educational Services is providing occupational therapy (OT) services in a variety of mental health classrooms in Calgary. Most of the students served are in junior and senior high school, while some are seen as early as grade 2.

Students in these classrooms have diagnoses such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) or Generalized Anxiety Disorder. These children often have difficulties with fine-motor and organizational skills, areas often addressed by occupational therapists. In addition, they may have difficulties with sensory processing, anger management, anxiety management and/or social skills.

Why is occupational therapy a treatment of choice for these children? The core practice of occupational therapy is to look at the everyday 'occupations' (or activities) of individuals and what might impair their ability to carry out these activities. If an emotional problem is having an impact on how a student functions in a classroom or how that child carries out the activities required of a student, then an OT can help. Just as an OT may work to improve a child's poor printing because it interferes with the student's ability to get work done, an OT may work with a child whose anxiety is causing him/her to have difficulty in school. In this case, the OT would teach strategies to reduce anxiety - things such as yoga techniques, deep breathing or positive self talk.

In addition to working with individual students, Renfrew occupational therapists can educate teachers and teaching assistants about mental health concerns and the options for intervention. They can provide realistic and practical strategies specific to the student and to the teacher's situation.

There is much that can be done to help children with mental health difficulties. Renfrew's occupational therapists are "Helping Kids Soar"!

