

## Assessments for children with sensory needs in Solihull

Occupational Therapists are trained to assess difficulties that are affecting the child's activities in everyday life : the focus is on 'occupation'. Sensory issues are therefore considered in the context of looking at the child's ability to engage and perform in daily activities which are relevant to their environment.

A sensory assessment is completed as a standard part of an OT assessment for a child or young person who accesses OT. For children who access OT from a community mental health services, it depends on the reason for referral.

The OT assessment may be from an OT who is working from a community health service, or from an OT who is working within a mental health community CAMHS service. This is Solar for Solihull or Forward Thinking Birmingham for Birmingham).

All services offer advice and guidance to families based on the assessment findings, with a focus on finding solutions rather than only listing the difficulties (or deficits).

### **What does an OT sensory screening assessment involve?**

Occupational Therapists look at the child or young person in the context of different environments to see how they manage the impact of sensory stimuli and how they join in with activities or occupations.

OTs use a range of methods to gather information and it may vary from child to child. Methods include observing the child and asking others who know the child well to fill in a standardised sensory questionnaire. Sensory assessments are best completed through looking at the interaction of the child / young person, their environment and the occupation or activity that they need to do.

### **OT offer from the community service**

The community OT service is delivered in the way that gives means the greatest number of child, young people and families can benefit. This means that general OT support is available for all without waiting too long and then the smaller numbers of children who need more individual and specialist help can get it as well.

### **Solihull community OT**

Sensory Advice and Information from UHB:

[Understanding My Child's Sensory Needs – Solihull Children's Community Therapies \(uhb.nhs.uk\)](https://www.uhb.nhs.uk/understanding-my-childs-sensory-needs-solihull-childrens-community-therapies)

In Solihull, children who are referred into the service are screened and depending on the information in that referral, will follow different pathways.

**If the referral details a child has difficulties in their everyday activities (their occupations) at home** which are felt to be because of differences in their sensory preferences (for example they have significant difficulties in eating different textures of foods or they cannot wear appropriate clothes for the weather when going outdoors), the family will be offered a sensory workshop to watch, alongside some worksheets to complete to help apply some of the information in the workshop to their real-life situation and goals they have. The family are then advised to trial these for 6 weeks and have a logbook to help them keep track.

If after 6 weeks, the family find the child is not progressing in their occupational goals or feel there are concerns at school or not related to sensory processing, they can contact the service (by phone 0121 722 8010 or e-mail [paediatric.occupationaltherapy@nhs.net](mailto:paediatric.occupationaltherapy@nhs.net)) to book in for a review telephone appointment with an Occupational Therapist. This is an opportunity to explore the goals together with the therapist to come up with a joint plan:

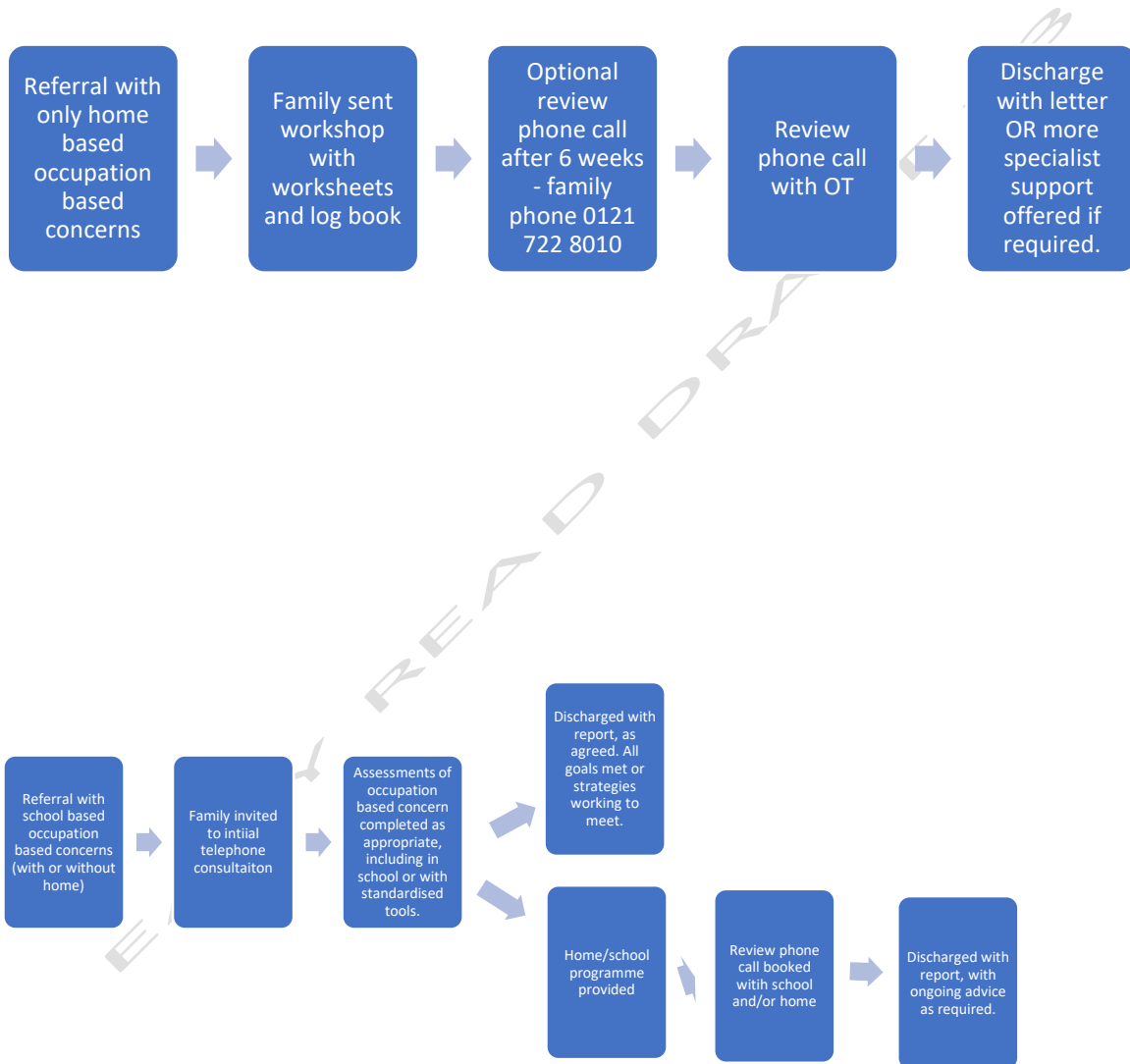
- If there are no unaddressed goals (for example there are no concerns at school and the child does not have any other daily living difficulties that are felt to be impacted by other factors) then a discharge letter is sent summarising what has been completed.
- If there are unaddressed concerns, for example the referral did not mention concerns at school but parents inform the service of these, then Occupational Therapy will support in a similar way to below (although the initial phone call will not be completed, as the review phone call will act as this).

**If the referral details a child has difficulties in their everyday activities (their occupations) at school (as well as home or only at school),** the parents are sent a letter inviting them to ring the service (0121 722 8010) to book onto an initial telephone assessment. This is an opportunity to explore all concerns with the family:

- If there are only school-based goals (for example, for the child to be able to eat their dinner at school, which they currently cannot do due managing the sensory environment of the lunch hall), with parental consent, the occupational therapist will liaise with the school to gather more information.
- If there are home based concerns as well which are due to sensory preferences, the family will be invited to watch the workshop with the resources, as above.
- If there are home based concerns which are not based on sensory preferences, these will also be assessed alongside the school concerns.
- An assessment of the specific occupational goals (eating in the lunch hall in this instance) will then be completed, including discussions with relevant staff members). Depending on the needs of the child, the family, the occupation and the environment this may be done in different ways, for example:
  - The occupational therapist may attend the school to observe the child in the lunch hall at their usual lunch time.
  - The occupational therapist may complete a video consultation with the school where the school shares videos of the child in the lunch hall at their usual lunch time.
  - Any further assessments will be completed if felt to be required in order to improve the child's performance in the occupational goals, such as the Sensory Profile 2.
- The way the assessment is conducted will be completed in the most appropriate way for the child, as decided by the team around the child (child, if able, parents, occupational therapist, school staff and any others as necessary). A virtual assessment with pre-recorded videos may be completed over a face to face observation for a child who will find the presence of the occupational therapist too overwhelming, for instance.
- Once all goals have been assessed:
  - A child may be discharged with a final report (this could be completed for if there were minor concerns, such as needing to change seating position which was resolved in the assessment session, or if the parent did not want ongoing support).

- A programme of advice is sent to the parents and school with a logbook to track strategies implemented and a review session is booked in with the relevant party or parties as agreed.
- A final report is written up. If further strategies are required, they will be included in the report.

Pathways



It is important to acknowledge that many common and moderate to severe mental health concerns can impact a child or young person's response to sensory stimulation, rather than symptoms being an indicator of a significant sensory need or sensory processing disorder.

Within mental health services therefore the focus of sensory screening is to utilise the understanding of these current responses to sensory input to support and aid treatment plans/ care plans towards; mental health crisis, preparation and grounding for psychological work, self-management techniques alongside other OT interventions promoting mental health recovery and daily functioning.

Mental health OT service will only consider sensory screening for children and young people already within their service due to requiring secondary mental health support. A decision on whether screening takes place will be discussed with the MDT, a sensory practitioner to determine whether a sensory approach may be helpful for the young person and family in light of what other interventions are currently in place.

The Solar OT team links closely with the community OT team.

Solar accepts internal referrals for C&YP who are open to Solar for mental needs and receiving other input within other specialist Solar teams.

Solar do not offer a sensory assessment or intervention in isolation but will review sensory needs within an OT assessment with a focus on function and independent living. They also provide support for social skills, and community graded exposure work.

The Occupational Therapy Service is aiming to develop their Occupational Therapy offer into pathways that reflect our partner trusts universal, targeted and specialist mode.