

Assessments for children with sensory needs in Birmingham

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. CAMHS is within Forward Thinking 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 children, 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.

Birmingham Community OT (delivered by Birmingham Community Healthcare)

To access the sensory pathway, a referral will need to be made to the service. The referral form can be downloaded from: www.bhamcommunity.nhs.uk/child-ot

When a referral comes into Occupational Therapy, the information in the referral is used to guide how the child and family might benefit from occupational therapy.

Referrals are not accepted directly from parents but are accepted from health professionals, educational psychology, social workers, the Communication and Autism Team, the Physical Disabilities Support Service and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCo)/teaching staff.

Universal:

Any family / professional can phone the **OT advice line (0121) 683 2325** Open Mon-Fri 9am-4pm and speak directly with an Occupational Therapist to discuss concerns, receive advice and strategies to support the child's sensory difficulties.

No referral is required is needed to access the OT advice line.

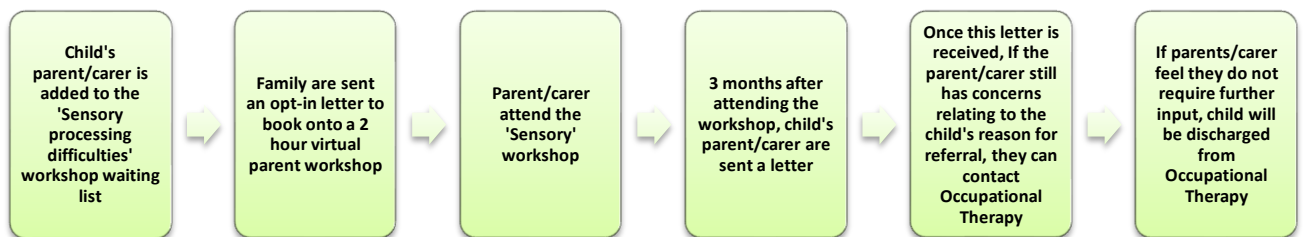
Check out the webpages: www.bhamcommunity.nhs.uk/child-ot This page has the links to the 'Advice videos: mini sensory series, as well as the 'Sensory advice pack' which can be downloaded

Targeted: If referral has been accepted into the OT service and ideas have already been tried from calling the advice line, but issues with daily tasks are continuing, then the family can access further support, known as 'the sensory pathway'. The family are offered a sensory workshop.

Specialist (1:1 support): OT will decide if need to see at home (tailored advice) or school (look at environment, self-regulation activities) observations. The occupational therapy team uses a range of factors to decide whether a child needs a 1:1 assessment at home or school. These include:

- Have the family accessed other resources and advice first (parent workshop) and implemented these?
- if a school referral, has the SENCo accessed SEND team for advice
- complex presentation with a number of functional difficulties affecting everyday life

The BCHC OT sensory pathway:



BCHC occupational therapy (delivered by the locality-based SEND OT team)

Another team, who sit within BCHC Occupational Therapy, is the SEND therapy team. This team of occupational therapists work directly with education to provide advice and strategies to mainstream schools and Early Years settings. If parents have a child in a mainstream school or Early Years setting, the SENCo or other teaching staff can contact the occupational therapist who covers the area of their child's educational setting. The school can request an advice meeting to access advice and support.

In addition, settings can access training from the SEND therapy team, on a range of topics. The SEND team (which also includes Speech and Language Therapists) can be contacted on: bchc.sendtherapy@nhs.net

Parents can access pre-recorded webinars, delivered by the SEND team, via this link too: <https://www.localofferbirmingham.co.uk/webinars/>

Feedback from parents for sensory workshops:

- *"The sensory workshop is also a way to explain that the way children/adults behave/react isn't always because of a sensory issue – there are a multitude of different reasons such as*

illness, tiredness, hunger, stress, motivation so it's our chance to help widen parents thinking beyond just sensory and look at their child holistically."

- *"The workshop also empowers the parents (as a specialist in their child) with knowledge, understanding and skills to help them problem solve in the future too - possibly preventing another referral in OT for general advice."*
- *"The reason we kept the workshop going was because of the feedback we received from families after the sessions were all really positive - off the top of my head having that shared experience and knowing that families weren't alone were sort of the top outcomes."*

OT in Forward Thinking Birmingham

Sensory needs and mental health services in Birmingham and Solihull

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.

In Birmingham mental health OT support is provided by Forward Thinking Birmingham (part of Birmingham Women's & Children's Trust) and in Solihull it is provided by SOLAR (part of Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust).

- Both teams have links with each other and their area community OT teams
- They each accept internal referrals for C&YP who are open to Solar/FTB for mental needs and receiving other input within the team.
- 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.
- FTB consider sensory approaches within their holistic Occupational assessments and interventions. Referrals are not accepted for the sole purpose of sensory assessment and Ayres Sensory Integration is not a part of the OT mental health offer. Following on from an initial OT assessment sensory screening may be considered to further inform their interventions and approaches.

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