

Pathways to Early Autism Diagnosis & Treatment:

Experiences and Best Practices of Front Line Providers

Laura Nagel, MS, OTR/L
Occupational Therapist
Director of Operations

State of Wisconsin Symposia Series on Early Access to Autism Treatment
September 22, 2020



Background & Perspectives

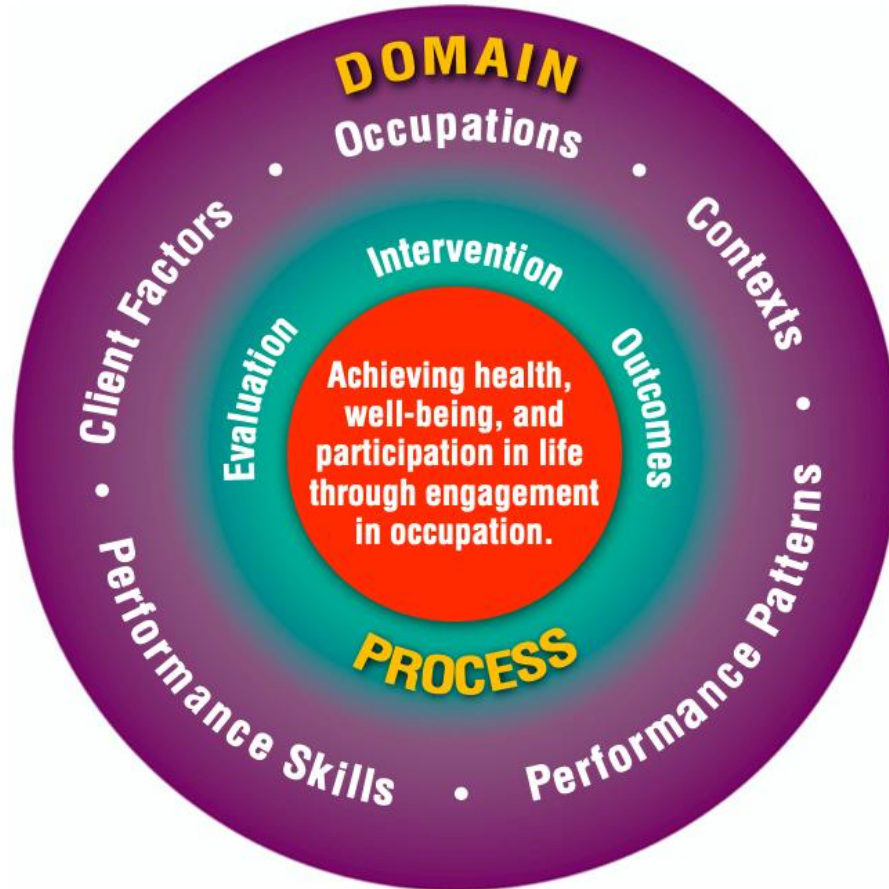
- ▶ 5+ years as an ABA provider
- ▶ 10 years providing pediatric occupational therapy services
- ▶ Past Co-President & Current South Central District Chair for Wisconsin Occupational Therapy Association (WOTA)
- ▶ Parent



GUIDING CONCEPTS

- EARLY IDENTIFICATION
- EARLY INTERVENTION

What is Occupational Therapy?



What kinds of skills do Occupational Therapy professionals address with children?

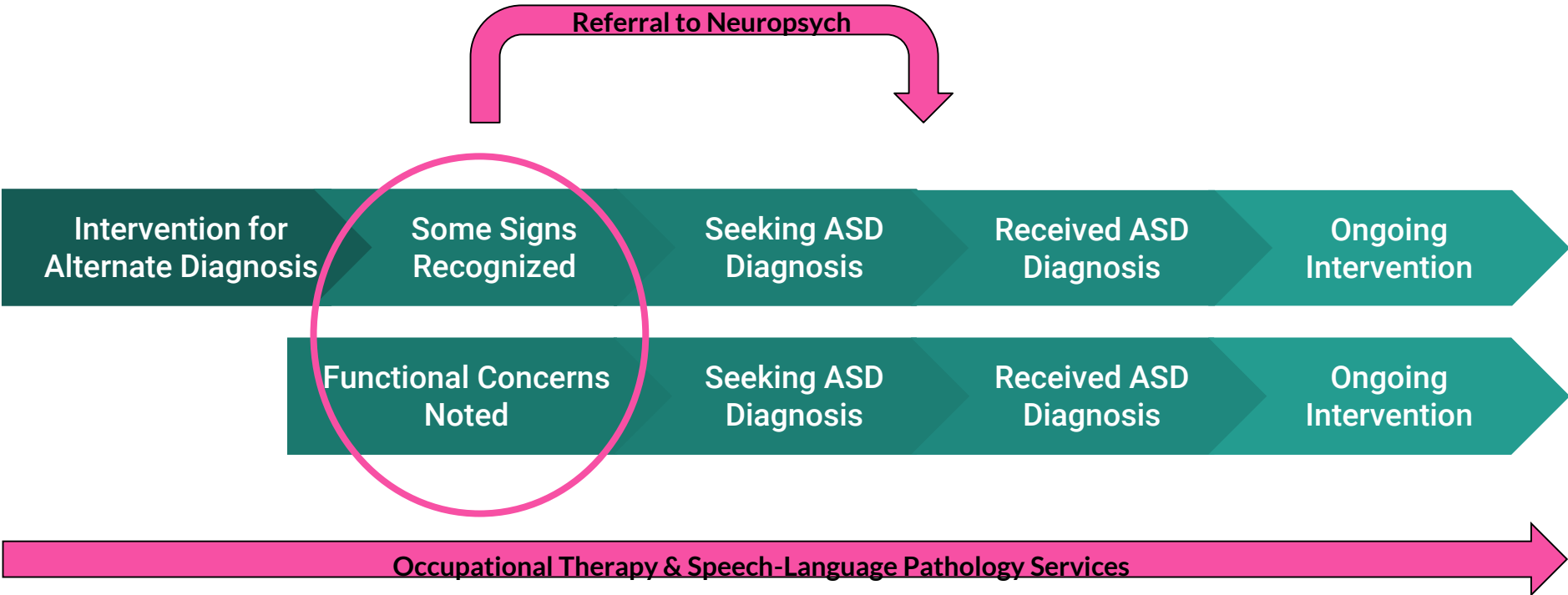
- ▶ Self-care skills
- ▶ Executive functioning (short term memory, organization and planning, problem solving, etc.)
- ▶ Self-regulation (sensory processing, managing emotions, etc.)
- ▶ Fine motor (hand writing, strength/endurance, need for orthotics, etc.)
- ▶ Visual motor
- ▶ Feeding
- ▶ Bilateral coordination
- ▶ Strength and endurance
- ▶ Play
- ▶ Social engagement
- ▶ Participation in leisure activities
- ▶ Life skills (grocery shopping and meal preparation, household management, etc.)
- ▶ Daily roles and routines (bath time, getting ready in the morning, etc.)

...and more!

Pathways to Treatment: Occupational Therapy & Speech-Language Pathology



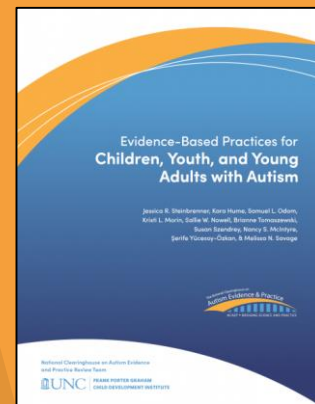
Pathways to Treatment: Occupational Therapy & Speech-Language Pathology



What is the Value of Occupational Therapy for Children **with ASD**?

- ▶ National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP) Report, 2020
 - ▶ **21+** of 27 interventions can be targeted through occupational therapy :

- | | |
|--|---|
| ▶ Antecedent-based interventions | ▶ Reinforcement |
| ▶ Augmentative and Alternative Communication | ▶ Response interruption/redirection |
| ▶ Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategy | ▶ Self-management |
| ▶ Direct instruction | ▶ Sensory Integration® |
| ▶ Exercise and movement | ▶ Social Narratives |
| ▶ Functional behavior assessment | ▶ Social Skills Training |
| ▶ Modeling | ▶ Task analysis |
| ▶ Naturalistic Intervention | ▶ Technology-Aided Instruction and Interventions |
| ▶ Parent-Implemented Intervention | ▶ Time delay |
| ▶ Prompting | ▶ Video modeling |
| | ▶ Visual supports |



What is the Value of Occupational Therapy for Children with ASD?

- ▶ Address foundational skills to increase functional participation
- ▶ Consider the whole child, their environment, external expectations, family and support network



Pathways to Treatment: Occupational Therapy Practice Settings Applicable to Children with ASD

- ▶ Birth to Three
- ▶ Early Intervention
- ▶ Public Schools
- ▶ Outpatient Clinics
- ▶ Mental Health Clinics
- ▶ Hospitals
- ▶ Community Health Centers
- ▶ College Campuses

Pathways to Treatment: Case Studies

- ▶ Marcus, 2 yrs old
 - ▶ Referred related to feeding concerns
 - ▶ Initial evaluation indicates several signs of ASD
 - ▶ Therapy team discusses referral for diagnostic testing

- ▶ Billy, 5 yrs old
 - ▶ Difficulty with handwriting skills
 - ▶ Joins handwriting group and difficulty building social relationships observed
 - ▶ Therapy team discusses referral for diagnostic testing

- ▶ Maricella, 8 yrs old
 - ▶ Has an educational ASD diagnosis through public school
 - ▶ Seeks outpatient occupational therapy services for support with bath time routine and bike riding

- ▶ Peter, 14 yrs old
 - ▶ Previously received diagnosis, has completed ABA intensive programming
 - ▶ Develops skills related to meal preparation, organization of homework, and how to interview for his first job

Evidence Based Practice

- ▶ National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP) Report
- ▶ Data Driven Decision Making
- ▶ Extrapolating from Existing Literature, Combined with....

If you've met
ONE CHILD WITH AUTISM,
You've met
ONE child
with autism

Barriers to Timely Access to Funding & Services

- ▶ Need providers to be receptive to referral for dx process and NOT WAIT
- ▶ Private payers require physician referral for occupational therapy, even though it is not required by the State of Wisconsin
- ▶ Refer to occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists when identifying red flags/symptoms while children are on waiting lists
- ▶ Wisconsin's "Autism Insurance Mandate" ([632.895\(12m\)](#)) requires "evidence based practices", but this is not clearly defined
- ▶ Children served through MA require prior authorizations for ongoing services
- ▶ Diagnostician provider shortages
- ▶ Lack of credentialing for professionals to become certified mental health workers to gain access to additional Medicaid funding
- ▶ Funding available for increased training for public school SEAs (special education assistants/paraprofessionals/1:1 aides)



THANK YOU!

Contact Information

laura@citherapies.com

www.citherapies.com

608.819.6394