



## WINTER 2024 POTS NEWSLETTER



### **Unveiling the Developmental Marvel of Handwriting: Bridging Minds in the Digital Age A Letter from Dr. Chaye Lamm Warburg, Owner and Director of POTS**

Dear Parents, Caregivers, Colleagues and Esteemed Team Members,

I trust this message finds you well and thriving in our collective pursuit of empowering the children under our care. As the Director of Pediatric Occupational Therapy Services (POTS), I am compelled to delve deeper into the intricate tapestry of handwriting, backed by solid research that underscores its pivotal role in childhood development.

From a young age, children are judged by what they write! Research has demonstrated that if handwriting is sloppy or illegible, children will be judged poorly. First Impressions count!

Set up your child for success: Address the precursors to pre-handwriting early. If you suspect a glitch in fine motor skills, eye-hand coordination, the use of two sides of the body, and core strength, get an occupational therapy evaluation to check it out. So much can be done to strengthen underlying skills and avoid future problems.

#### **1. Developmental Progression:**

Research consistently affirms that handwriting is a part of a developmental progression, not merely a set of acquired skills. From the early scribbles that mark a toddler's first attempts to the refined cursive of adolescence, each stage contributes significantly to a child's overall cognitive development. Our dedicated Occupational Therapists well-versed in guiding children through these crucial milestones, ensuring a seamless progression that lays a solid foundation for future academic achievements.

#### **2. Integrating the Two Sides of the Brain:**

Handwriting engages both hemispheres of the brain and is reported to “wire the brain.” Neuroscientific studies have highlighted the cognitive benefits of handwriting, as it activates different parts of the brain associated with language, memory, and motor skills. This synchronization is particularly crucial in the digital age, where the ubiquity of screens often leads to a more unilateral engagement. By promoting handwriting, we are actively encouraging the balanced development of both sides of the brain, facilitating a well-rounded cognitive foundation for the children in our care.



### 3. Essential Role in the Digital Age:

In an era dominated by keyboards and touchscreens, the significance of handwriting might be underestimated. However, it is precisely in this digital age that the role of handwriting becomes more significant. Research suggests that the act of physically writing enhances comprehension, retention, and creative thinking. By honing this skill, we equip our children with a unique cognitive advantage, allowing them to navigate the digital landscape with enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

As we collectively champion the cause of childhood development, let us remember that handwriting is more than markings on paper. It is a dynamic force shaping the very foundation of young minds. POTS remains steadfast in integrating research-backed insights into our interventions, ensuring that each child's handwriting journey is not only a process but a transformative experience.

Should you have any questions or seek further guidance regarding your child's handwriting development, our dedicated team is always here to provide support. Together, let us continue to unlock the full potential of every child.

With sincere dedication,

*Dr. Chaye Lamm Warburg, DPT OTR/L*  
Director, Pediatric Occupational Therapy Services



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Developmental Checklist



**Employee Spotlight:  
Laura Ironman M.S., CCC-SLP, Speech Therapist**



**1. Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your background in pediatric speech therapy?**

I grew up on Long Island and went to school at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh for both my undergraduate and graduate degrees in Speech Language Pathology. I have worked in schools, private clinics and home health for over 5 years now, loving working with pediatrics. I love working with autistic children as well as supporting kids with childhood Apraxia of Speech.

**2. What inspired you to become a Pediatric Speech Therapist?**

My sister convinced me I would be great for the job. I grew up performing in theater, and speech therapy is a very performative job. Similar to live theatre - you constantly have to be ready for anything to happen. Knowing I could be helping give children the ability to advocate for themselves is what empowers me to be the best therapist I can be each day.

**3. Can you share some memorable experiences or milestones in your career at POTS so far?**

I'm still relatively new to POTS. Being almost 2 months "in," I can say that I love the problem solving and collaboration I have with my coworkers. Everyone is so kind and wants to help each other out.

**4. What aspects of your interactions with POTS kids bring you joy?**

My favorite part of the job is when a client feels the difference in their communication. I love empowering children, and showing them how speech support can help them thrive. The pride in their eyes when they say a particularly hard word, or ask for help for the first time is the best feeling in the world.



**5. What challenges do you face in your work with pediatric patients, and how do you overcome them?**

One common challenge is the buy-in for speech therapy. I often tell my parents the tried and true phrase: “It’s a marathon, not a sprint.” I’ve had sessions where a child will not speak once, but we worked on rapport building, problem-solving, and non-speaking communication skills that all support and empower that child. There’s a lot going on “behind the curtains” that facilitates communication, and it can be hard when results are not immediately obvious.

**6. Tell me about the Social Skills Group scheduled for January 10th – March 14th?**

I have conducted many Social Skills groups in the past, for kids ranging from age 3 all the way to pre-teens. A primary goal of this social group is to support children who may want to make friends, but aren’t sure how. We will be working on how to communicate with others, how to understand our own emotions from a social-emotional learning (SEL) perspective, and how to advocate for ourselves in order to thrive in social settings. Sessions will be structured to include play, and other natural activities children may experience before, during, and after school, but with strategies provided and practiced and to enable them to feel successful.

**7. What advice do you give parents to bump the impact speech therapy sessions at home?**

If someone were to only go to the gym 1x weekly for 30-45 minutes, it would take them a very long time to become an incredibly fit person. I remind parents that even if that same person were to practice at home and “work out” for even for 10 minutes each day, they would reach their goal much more quickly. The same is true for speech therapy. The more quality practice a child gets on a daily basis, infused into their lives, the faster they will achieve their goals.



## 8. Are there any specific apps or tools you find particularly helpful for speech therapy with children?

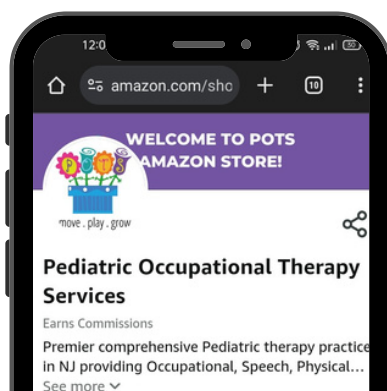
I am a child-led speech therapist. This means that whatever a child expresses interest in - I am immediately interested too! It helps build rapport, create a bond, and entice them into my space. It is INCREDIBLY motivating for that child to want to communicate when it's about something they like. Children are not going to be motivated to talk about things they don't care about, regardless of any diagnosis or communication level.

## 9. Are there any recent developments in speech therapy that have caught your attention?

There is a lot of new information regarding Gestalt Language Processing or "Natural Language Acquisition." I've taken a few courses on it now, and it's showing us that there are actually two ways to develop language, rather than just one. It posits that children whose speech may appear "delayed" as they are not talking, but love to sing, and repeat scripts from their favorite television shows may be developing language in larger chunks, rather than starting off with single words, as is more traditional. It's a super interesting development and I'm continuing to learn more so I can better support my client's language development.

## 10. Where do you see the future of speech therapy for kids?

I see much more child-led therapy that supports children building autonomy and engaging in play-based therapy. It's fun for the child, and it is a lot easier to make progress when children LIKE coming to speech therapy, as opposed to having to be dragged kicking and screaming to sit at a table and repeat words.



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## **POTS Social Skills Group: Ages 5-8**

Empower your children with the social skills and confidence to build and maintain healthy friendships.

Join Laura Ironman, MA, CCC-SLP for a 10-week social skills group rooted in social-emotional learning and effective communication skills.

**Who:** Children ages 5-8 years old

**Where:** Pediatric Occupational Therapy Services  
1415 Queen Anne Road, Teaneck, NJ 07666

**When:** Weekly on Thursdays, 5:00-6:00 PM  
January 11, 2024 - March 14, 2024 (10 sessions)

**How:** Fill out an application form

A 15-minute in-person interview with your child is required prior to acceptance into the program

December 22, 2023: Deadline for applications and deposit

### **SPOTS ARE LIMITED**

**FEES:**

\$950.00 for the program (includes interview)



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to register!





## **Changing seasons: How to make layering clothing feel less icky: Insights from Pediatric Occupational Therapy**

Today, we delve into a daily challenge for parents and caregivers: helping children with sensory challenges feel more comfortable while wearing layers of clothing.

The Layer Dilemma: A Scientific Perspective on Sensory Sensitivities

Research indicates that many children experience discomfort when wearing layers due to sensory hyper-sensitivities. From abrasive fabrics to constrictive fits, these sensitivities can render getting dressed a challenging task fraught with daily power struggles, meltdowns, and sometimes school refusal. Pediatric occupational therapy, rooted in evidence-based practices, offers valuable insights into making the layering process more agreeable.

Evidence-Based Strategies

### **1. Fabric Selection:**

Recent studies, such as those published in the *Journal of Sensory Studies* [Smith et al., 2021], emphasize the importance of selecting soft and breathable fabrics to minimize irritation. Fabrics like cotton or moisture-wicking blends not only provide comfort but also reduce the risk of overheating.

### **2. Seamless Designs:**

Research highlights the significance of seamless designs in reducing discomfort associated with clothing. Seamless socks, underwear, and shirts can alleviate irritation caused by traditional seams.



### **3. Gradual Exposure:**

A study in the *Journal of Pediatric Occupational Therapy* [Brown et al., 2019] suggests introducing layers gradually. Starting with a single layer and progressively adding more allows the child to acclimate to the sensation at their own pace.

### **4. Compression Clothing:**

Compression garments provide deep-touch pressure which quashes irritating light touch and helps children feel more comfortable and secure. Try commercially available compression shirts or leggings, or order specialty garments that can be worn discreetly under regular clothing.

### **5. Sensory Input Activities:**

Engaging in sensory activities before dressing has shown positive outcomes. Activities like deep-pressure massage or joint compression improve self-regulation and can provide a sense of calmness.

### **6. Customizing the Experience:**

It's important to allow children to have some control over the layering process. Providing choices in clothing options or involving them in selecting outfits can empower them and reduce anxiety.

Incorporating evidence-based strategies into the dressing process can significantly enhance the comfort and overall well-being of children with sensory sensitivities. It is essential to recognize that every child is unique, and what works for one may not work for another. Consulting with a pediatric occupational therapist can provide personalized strategies tailored to your child's specific needs.

Wishing you and your families a season filled with comfort and warmth!





## **Nurturing Connections: Positive Ways for Family Members to Bond with Children Beyond Physical Touch**

As parents, family members, and friends the desire to connect with children is innate. While hugs and kisses are traditional expressions of affection, not all children respond positively to physical touch. Fortunately, there are numerous ways to connect with children that respect their preferences, enable them to maintain their body integrity and feel loved.

Head it off at the Pass: Advocate for your child. Alert relatives and friends that while your child really digs them, he doesn't tolerate physical closeness and touching, but he LOVES \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank), and his favorite toys are \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank), and his favorite topics are \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank). That will give them a way to connect that will not thrust your child into fight-or-flight and a meltdown.

### **1. Engage in Playful Activities:**

Children thrive on play, and engaging in interactive and sensory-rich activities can be an excellent way to connect. Activities such as building, Play-Doh, playing board games and imaginary play, promote bonding beyond hugging and kissing when you give your kids your FULL attention.

### **2. Create a Sensory-Friendly Environment:**

Understanding a child's sensory preferences is crucial for successful connections. Some children may be sensitive to certain stimuli, such as noise, while others may seek more sensory input, such as crashing or moving. By creating a sensory-friendly environment, such as using soft lighting, calming scents, textured objects, or a trampoline family members can connect with children on a level that is comfortable and enjoyable for them.



### **3. Communicate Through Words and Gestures:**

Verbal and non-verbal communication are powerful tools for building connections. Encourage open and honest communication by actively listening to a child's thoughts and feelings, reading their body language, and reflecting back to them so that you are sure that you are understanding them. Create a safe space where children feel comfortable expressing themselves without the need for physical affection.

### **4. Foster Shared Interests:**

Discover and cultivate shared interests with the child to build a strong connection. Whether it's a shared love for nature, art, or a specific hobby, finding common ground facilitates meaningful interactions without relying on physical touch.

### **5. Respect Personal Space:**

Be mindful that a child may have clearly defined personal boundaries even though they violate YOUR personal space! Allow them to take the lead and initiate contact when they feel comfortable.

### **6. Give Kids Jobs:**

Give kids something structured and socially acceptable to do when company arrives. It will provide them with an instant way to connect. For example, teach them how to pass out the snacks, ask grown ups what soft-drinks they would like, or collect the paper plates. Practice in advance so they feel secure in their role.

### **7. Incorporate Physical Gestures:**

For children who tolerate some physical contact, firm touch (think high-fives) is more acceptable than light touch (think tapping on the shoulder). High fives, fist bumps, or even playful shoulder bumps agreed upon in advance are all good options if your child agrees.

Connecting with children doesn't always have to involve hugs and kisses. By understanding and respecting a child's unique sensory preference and finding alternative ways to connect, family members can build strong, positive connections through engaging activities, open communication, and mutual interests.





## **Therapeutic Fun: Unwrapping the Benefits of Pediatric Occupational Therapy with Leftover Wrapping Paper**

As the holiday season wraps up, many of us find ourselves with an abundance of leftover wrapping paper. Instead of tossing it aside, consider turning these remnants into therapeutic and engaging activities, specially designed for kids. Today, we'll explore a myriad of creative ways to repurpose wrapping paper to promote sensory exploration, fine motor skills, and overall developmental growth in children.

### **1. Sensory Collage for Tactile Exploration:**

Create a sensory wonderland by using different textures of wrapping paper for a tactile collage. Encourage your children to explore and touch the various papers, enhancing their sensory awareness.

### **2. The Garbage Truck Game:**

Have children tear paper into bits or cut it into shapes to strengthen their hand muscles and bilateral coordination (using the two hands together), load them into a toy truck and “dump” them into a toy receptacle.

### **3. Visual Perception Games:**

Using a thick magic marker draw various shapes and sizes on the wrapping paper for kids to cut with scissors. Encourage children to sort them based on color, size, or pattern, tapping into visual discrimination skills.

### **4. Save Wrapping Paper Rolls!:**

Set up an obstacle course made out of wrapping paper and wrapping paper rolls. Children can crawl over, under, or through the paper, to practice gross motor skills and develop spatial awareness.



### **5. Funky Handwriting Practice:**

Write letters, numbers, or shapes on wrapping paper for kids to trace.

### **6. Cutting and Folding:**

Practice scissors skills by having children cut along thick lines or shapes on wrapping paper. Practice folding the paper on dotted lines to encourage them to use their two hands together.

### **7. Make Your Own Tetris:**

Create custom puzzles by cutting wrapping paper into pieces and having children assemble them. This activity supports visual-spatial skills and encourages problem-solving.

### **8. Match Textures:**

Refine the sense of touch by matching like textures of wrapping paper with eyes closed. Encourage children to use descriptive words to differentiate between how different types of paper feel.

### **9. Imaginative Play Costumes:**

Encourage imaginative play by incorporating wrapping paper costumes into pretend scenarios. Wrapping paper can become a doctor's coat, a superhero cape, or the mast of a pirate ship.

### **10. Design a Funky Hat:**

Remember bridal showers? Tear pieces of each wrapping paper and have kids glue them onto paper plates. Tie on two ribbons and they're ready for the runway!

Using wrapping paper provides found opportunities to seamlessly integrate pediatric occupational therapy skills into play. Tailor them to individual needs and goals, always considering the child's interests. Remember, therapy can be enjoyable and purposeful when wrapped in the excitement of creativity!

How do you use wrapping paper for fun? Send me your ideas at [office@potsot.com](mailto:office@potsot.com) and we will incorporate them into our ever-growing list!

Wishing you and your little ones a joyous and therapeutic journey upcycling wrapping paper!



## GLOSSARY

- **Apraxia of Speech** - Apraxia disruption in the signal from the brain to the muscles that coordinate the movement of the lip, tongue, jaw, and facial muscles.
- **Autism** - Autism is an umbrella term for a complex developmental disability also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Core features of autism are a) social and communication deficits, including difficulty with verbal and non-verbal communication, socialization, and play/leisure skills, b) fixated interests and repetitive or stereotypical behaviors, such as stacking, lining up or spinning toys, and hand flapping, and c) sensory processing irregularities, including poor motor planning. Children on the autism spectrum have a wide range of behaviors and abilities. There's a saying that goes, "If you've met one kid with autism, you've met one kid with autism."
- **Autonomy** - Independence
- **Child-led therapy** - therapy in which a child is given the opportunity to choose their own activity
- **Cognitive** – Cognition relates to conscious mental activities such as thinking, reasoning, remembering, and learning.
- **Cognitive development** – Cognitive development refers to how a child's thinking changes with age or experience.
- **Communication level** – Communication levels are different ways in which people communicate with each other. Communication can be divided into different categories and levels for different purposes. An example is verbal and nonverbal.
- **Compression clothing** – Form fitting snug elastic garment.
- **Deep pressure massage** - Deep Pressure Stimulation (DPS) is firm but gentle squeezing, hugs, or compression that relaxes the nervous system.
- **Evaluation** – An evaluation is a systematic process of gathering and interpreting data to ascertain a child's current levels of function, identify strengths and challenges.
- **Eye-Hand Coordination** – Eye-hand coordination is the ability of eyes and hands working together to support a wide range of skills such as, swatting a mobile, catching a ball, drawing, cutting and using a ruler.
- **Fine motor skills** - The coordination of the small muscles, bones and nerves of the hands to produce small precise movements, such as those needed for handwriting, stringing beads and buttoning.
- **Gestalt Language Processing** - Gestalt Language Processing is a form of speech language development that starts with whole memorized phrases and progresses to single words.
- **Gross motor skills** – Gross motor skills are abilities that enable us do tasks that involve large muscles in our torso, legs, and arms such as jumping, climbing and running.
- **Holistic** - A holistic approach is characterized by the treatment of the whole person, taking into account mental and social factors, rather than just the symptoms of an illness.

## GLOSSARY

- **Joint compression** - Joint Compression is a form of sensory input that stimulates proprioceptive receptors in the joints by compression, push, or weight bearing placed on a joint. It is important for developing body awareness and body in space, as well as for joint stability and strength.
- **Milestones** – Developmental milestones are a set of goals or markers that a child is expected to achieve at specific times during maturation.
- **Motor skills** - Motor skills are functions that involve specific movements of the body's muscles and bones to perform physical tasks.
- **Natural Language Acquisition** - Natural Language Acquisition (NLA) is a natural method of developing language in which children process language as “whole chunks” instead of initially processing single words.
- **Neuroscientific** – Related to neuroscience which is the scientific study of the nervous system.
- **Non-speaking (nonverbal) communication skills** - Nonverbal communication means conveying information without using words. This might involve communicating with facial expressions, hand gestures, eye contact, physical proximity, and/or other nonverbal cues.
- **Occupational Therapy** - OT helps people with the job of living and participating in everyday activities (ADLs) across the lifespan. OT's help kids who struggle with everyday fine motor, gross motor and sensorimotor tasks such as getting dressed, writing on a chalkboard, organizing a backpack, playing with toys, and participating in circle time and in the playground, They also help kids who struggle with self-regulation and sensory processing dysfunction.
- **Play** - Engaging in an activity for enjoyment rather than a practical purpose.
- **Play-based therapy** - Play therapy is both a psychotherapeutic approach to children and a psycho-diagnostic tool that requires the therapist to come to the child's level and speak in his own language. Toys are like the child's words, through which the child is encouraged to explore his feelings, to understand and accept them and furthermore to process them using his innate imagination.
- **Sensory input** - The stimuli that are perceived by our senses, including smell, sight, touch, taste, hearing, movement and proprioception.





# GLOSSARY

- **Sensory preferences** - An individual comfort level with sensory experiences, such as sound, light, touch, taste, and smell.
- **Sensory stimulation** - Sensory stimulation is the input and sensation you receive when one or more of your senses is activated.
- **Sensory-friendly environment** – A sensory-friendly environment is a space that is free from noxious stimuli such as loud noises, crowding, a confusing visual array, and smells
- **Sensory-rich activities** - A sensory-rich activity is any activity that involves multiple sensory systems
- **Social Skills** - The ability to interact and communicate with others. Social skills include reading a social situation, social appropriateness, greeting someone, turn-taking, maintaining a conversation, and eye contact.
- **Spatial awareness** - Spatial awareness is the relative position of objects to each other and to the individual.
- **Speech Language Pathologist** - aka speech therapist, is a health professional who diagnoses and treats communication and swallowing disorders.
- **Speech Therapy** - Speech therapy is an intervention that improves a child's ability to understand language and express himself verbally and nonverbally.
- **Tactile** – Tactile relates to the perception of touch.
- **Visual discrimination** - Visual discrimination is the ability to detect differences in and ability to classify objects, symbols, or shapes. These can be categorized by color, position, form, pattern, texture, as well as size.
- **Visual perception** - Visual perception is the ability to see and interpret one's visual environment. It is the brain's ability to make sense of what the eyes see. Visual perception has many sub skills such as visual-spatial awareness and figure ground discrimination, that contribute to making sense of the visible world.

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*With love,*  
**POTS**

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