



# Occupational Therapy Leisure Coaching

Helping Children and Youth Develop Healthy and Enjoyable Hobbies & Interests

Occupational Therapy (OT) Leisure Coaching is one of several model programs developed as a part of Every Moment Counts: Promoting Mental Health Throughout the Day (see [www.everymomentcounts.org](http://www.everymomentcounts.org)). Funded by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), this mental health promotion initiative focuses on embedding strategies throughout the day to help all children and youth become mentally healthy in order to succeed at home, in school and in the community. This work focuses on reframing mental health as a positive state of functioning – it is more than the absence of mental illness. Positive mental health is associated with feeling good emotionally and doing well functionally in everyday life.

## About OT Leisure Coaching

The focus of OT Leisure Coaching is to help all children and youth explore, select and participate in extracurricular leisure activities in order to develop enjoyable hobbies and interests. OT Leisure Coaching can be provided either individually with a child/youth and family, or within a small group context. The occupational therapy practitioner serves as:

- An educator, sharing information about the health benefits of participation in enjoyable hobbies and interests with children/youth, families and school personnel;
- A facilitator of the change process, by working collaboratively with children/youth to help them explore and participate in enjoyable leisure activities; and
- An advocate of inclusive leisure participation, by promoting involvement in integrated school and community-sponsored extracurricular activities.

## Vision Statement

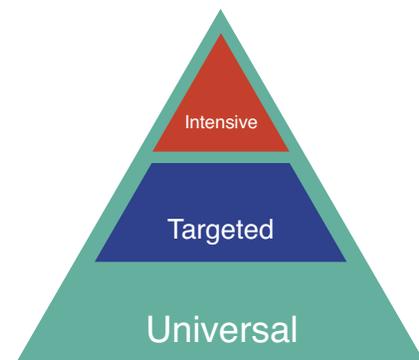
All children and youth have a right to participate in and enjoy healthy hobbies and interest in inclusive school and community settings.

## Why is OT Leisure Coaching Needed?

Research suggests that participation in out-of-school structured leisure activities can benefit children and youth socially, emotionally and academically.<sup>1,2</sup> Specifically, participation in structured leisure is associated with enhanced personal development (identity, initiative, and skill development) and interpersonal development (social skills and friendships).<sup>3</sup> Finally, participation in hobbies and interests that bring about positive emotions (e.g. joy, creativity, challenge) helps promote positive mental health and resilience.<sup>4</sup> When people do activities that are enjoyable, they feel happy.

## Who can Benefit from OT Leisure Coaching

At a universal level, it is important to educate all children/youth and families about the health benefits of leisure participation and how to successfully identify and participate in school and community sponsored activities. At the targeted and intensive levels, OT Leisure Coaching helps children and youth with or at-risk of physical and/or mental health challenges (e.g. those living in poverty, children who are bullied, those with disabilities etc.) to explore and participate in enjoyable leisure interests in inclusive settings.



## Why OT?

Occupational therapy practitioners are skilled in being able to analyze the social, emotional, physical and sensory aspects involved in doing an activity in order to make the modifications needed for successful participation. Using a collaborative coaching approach, OTs provide the supports and adaptations needed for successful participation (e.g. enhance needed skills; adapt entry into the activity; modify the activity; educate the activity director; etc.).

## Six Steps to Success

### 1. **Start the conversation about the importance of leisure**

– Meet with child/youth and parents and educate them about the health benefits of participation in meaningful hobbies and interest during out-of-school time. Obtain parental buy-in and support. Begin to develop a trusting relationship.

2. **Interest Inventory: Spark an interest** – Complete an interest inventory with child/youth; provide education about a variety of creative arts, sports, and nature-based activities; help child/youth prioritize list of interests; share with caregivers.

3. **Explore school or community-sponsored options** – Explore options for participation using the Internet based on the family resources; engage the child/youth and family in this process as much as possible. Know your community and venues for inclusive participation!

4. **Make a match and a plan** – Discuss school and/or community-sponsored options for participation with the child/youth and caregivers; plan for registration and entry into the activity. Contact the program instructor/coach (if necessary) to discuss relevant information regarding the child/youth's strengths and needs related to accommodations and successful participation.

### 5. **Just do it! Child/youth participates in the activity.**

OT coaching provided to foster success – only as much as needed (e.g. adapting entry into the activity, modifying the environment, coaching and support to instructor/coach, etc.).

6. **Occupational reflection and future plans** – Following participation, talk with the child/youth and caregivers (separately) about the experience – Explore likes? Dislikes? Foster ongoing exploration and participation in a variety of healthy hobbies and interests.

Coaching combines the use of emotional support and encouragement, information exchange, and a structured process of planning for and participating in chosen activities.<sup>5</sup> The OT serves as a facilitator of the change process.

- Emotional Support and encouragement is provided to build trust and help the child/youth and family explore and pursue leisure participation. OT uses: listening, empathy, reframing abilities, guiding and encouraging
- Information exchange between the OT, child/youth and family. OT shares information about the health benefits of leisure participation. Child/youth shares information about potential leisure interests. Family shares information about available resources (financial, transportation, time, etc.) and values related to leisure participation.
- Structured process involving identifying interests, exploring options, and planning for and engaging in the leisure activity (see OT Leisure Coaching process). This process often involves: activity analysis, problem-solving and scaffolding the experience; advocating for the child/youth/family; and therapeutic use of self to enable successful participation.

## Observed Outcomes: Pure Joy!

Children and youth with a variety of physical and mental health challenges successfully participate in community-sponsored activities including: adaptive sports (e.g. swimming, football), pottery, bird watching, crocheting, cooking classes, and arts & crafts.

**Coming Soon! OT Leisure Coaching materials will be made available soon at  
[www.everymomentcounts.org](http://www.everymomentcounts.org)**

<sup>1</sup>Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P, & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45, 294–309.

<sup>2</sup>Mahoney, J. L., Larson, R. W., Eccles, J. S., Lord, H. (2005). Organized activities as development contexts for children and adolescents. In J. Mahoney, R. Larson, & J. Eccles (Eds.), *Organized activities as contexts of development: Extracurricular activities, after-school and community programs*. (pp. 3-23). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

<sup>3</sup>Larson, R. W. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. *American Psychologist*, 55, 170-183.

<sup>4</sup>Frederickson, B. (2003). The value of positive emotions: The emerging science of positive psychology is coming to understand why it's good to feel good. *American Scientist*, 91, 330-335.

<sup>5</sup>Graham, F., & Rodger, S. (2010). Occupational performance coaching: Enabling children's and parents' occupational performance. In S. Rodger (Ed.), *Occupation-centered practice with children* (pp. 203–226). Oxford, England: Wiley-Blackwell.

**For further information:**

**Visit: [www.everymomentcounts.org](http://www.everymomentcounts.org) Contact: Susan Bazyk at [s.bazyk@csuohio.edu](mailto:s.bazyk@csuohio.edu)**