Pivoting Care Models: Using Yoga Group Interventions to Improve Access in Pediatric Occupational Therapy

OOTA Conference

October 16, 2026

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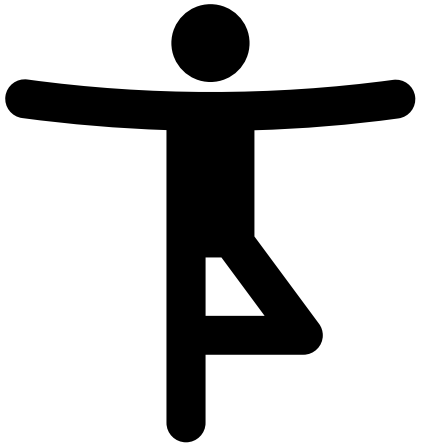
Learning Objectives



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Presenter Background

- Pediatric outpatient occupational therapist
- Yoga instructor in community setting to adults and children
- Started an OT yoga group at outpatient pediatric clinic



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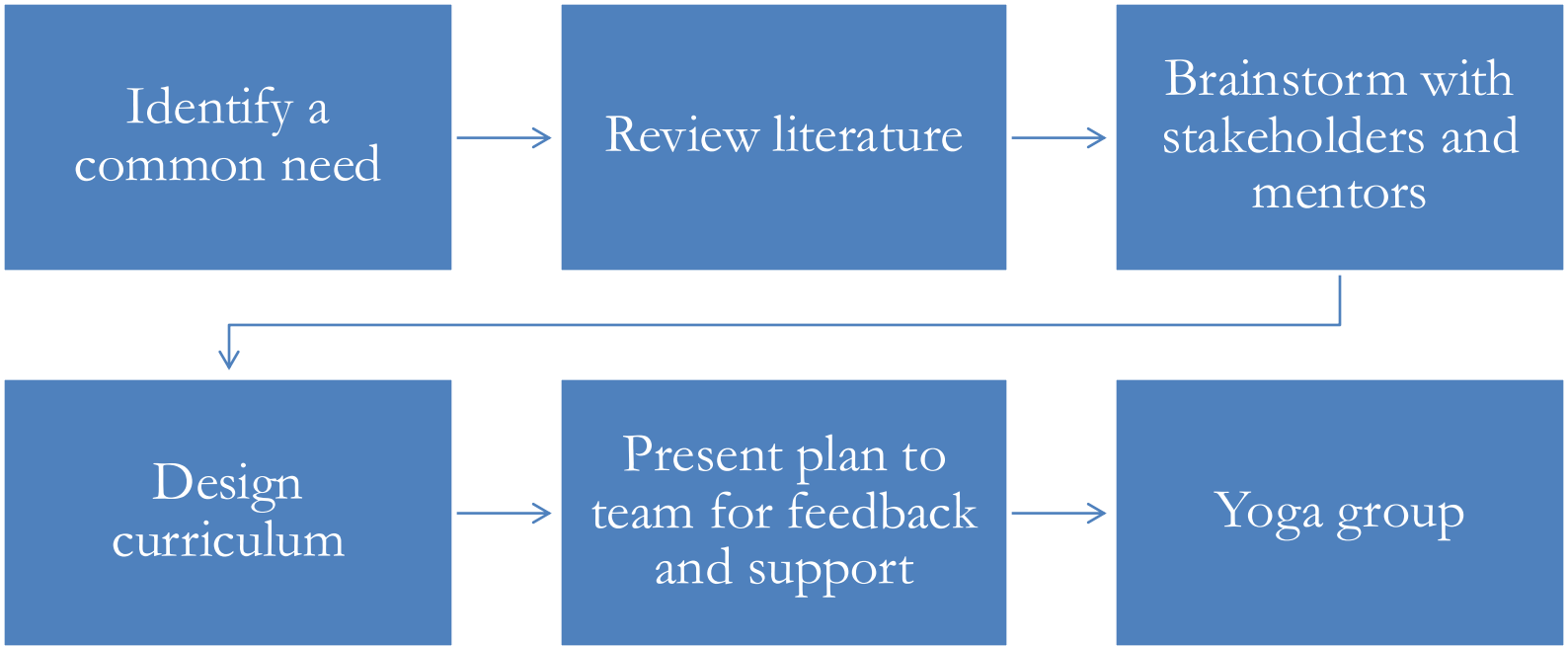
What brings you here today?



- Answer questions 1, 2, and 3 only
- Scroll to bottom of page
- Click submit
- Click submit another response

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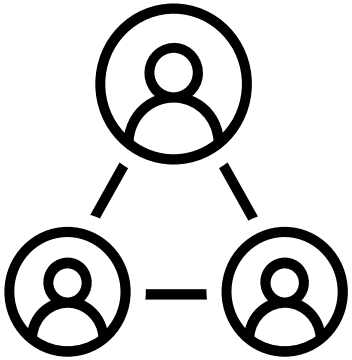
Group Development Process



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Benefits of Groups

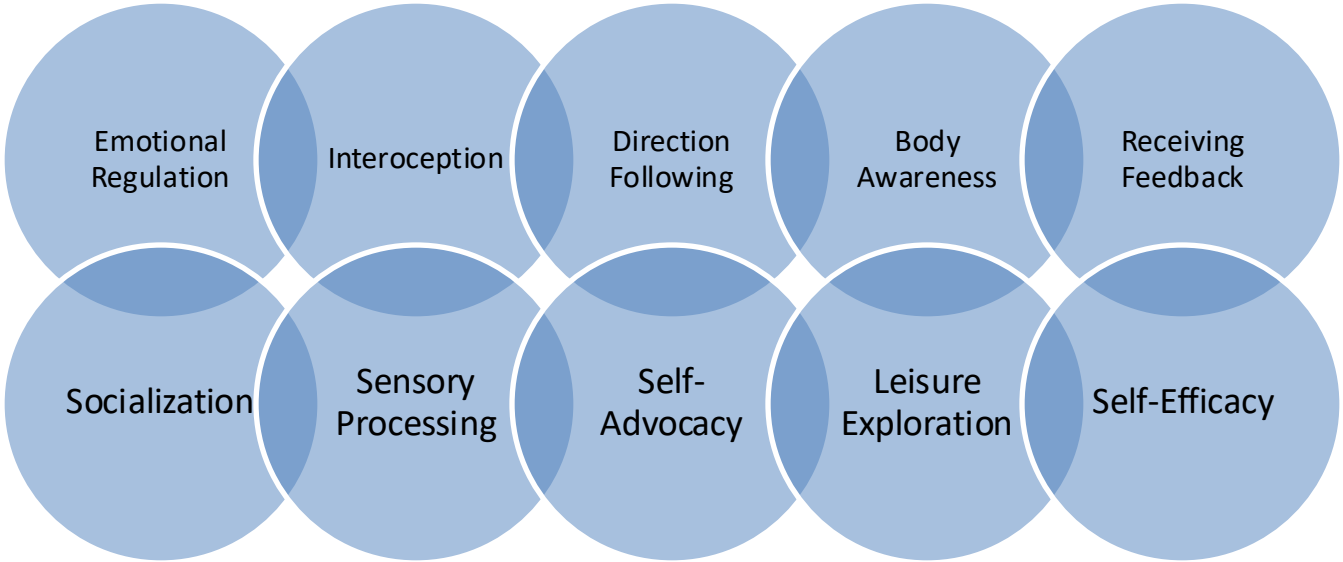
- Shared experiences
- Peer modeling
- Socialization
- Decrease waitlist



(Patten et al., 2024)

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Common Skills Addressed



(Patten et al., 2024)

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2. What skills or goals are you commonly working on with your caseload?

Enter your answer



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Literature Review



- Yoga helps stress, inattention, hyperactivity, anxiety, and depression (Patra et al., 2024)
- Mindfulness based interventions and CBT interventions are beneficial for autistic individuals (Patten et al., 2024)
- Yoga home carryover may be a challenge (Uebelacker et al., 2023)

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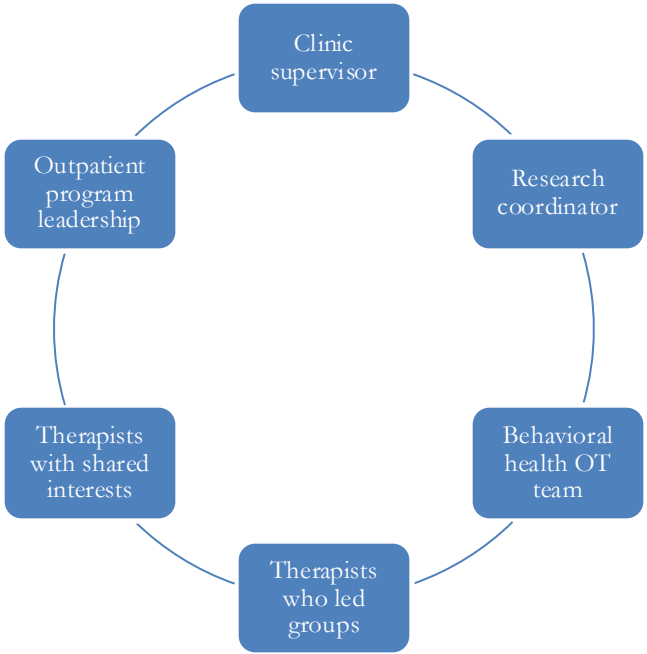
3. What is your comfort level with completing a literature review?

	1	2	3	4	5
1=not confident to 5= confident	○	○	○	○	○



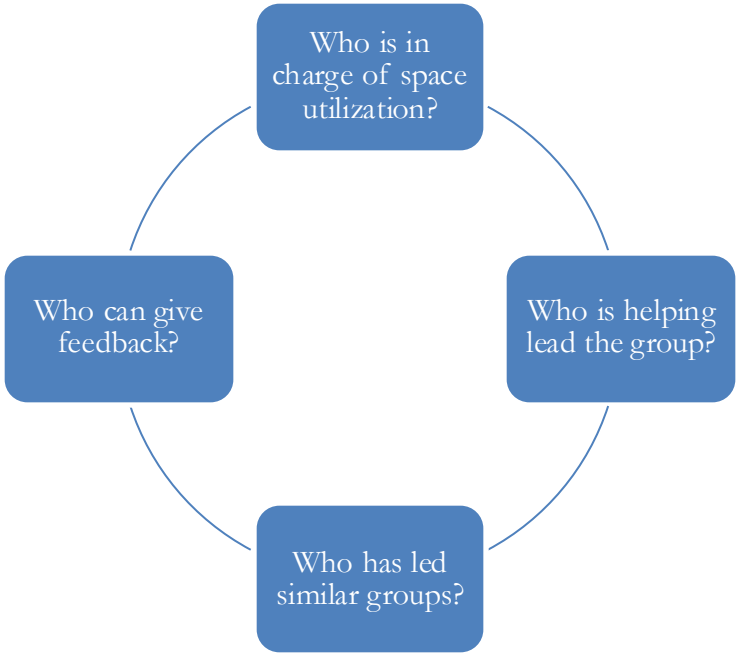
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Support Team



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Finding Your Support Team



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Size and Space



- Space considerations
  - Minimal distractions
  - Bathrooms accessible
- 4 patients: 1 occupational therapist
- Consider support staff

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Inclusion

- 7-12 years old
- In OT or was evaluated
- Speaking, minimally speaking, or non-speaking
- Follows 1-2 step directions
- Safely participates in group settings
- Exposure to English

Exclusion

- Limited direction following

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Good morning,

I wanted to send an invitation to (child's name) to participate in an occupational therapy yoga group we are doing at our Westerville Close to Home. I will be the therapist leading the group and thought (child's name) would be an amazing candidate to try it! You can continue individual therapy during the group weeks or just do the group during that time. Here are details about the group:

Who is the group for: children ages 7-11 years old with autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions; there will be 2-4 children in the group to focus on more individual attention while getting practice with other children

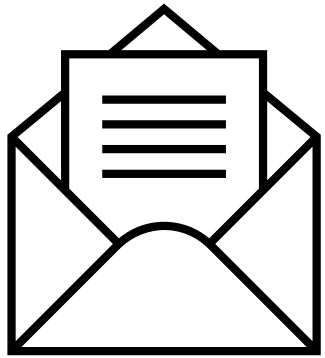
When: Mondays 5-6 PM for 10 weeks from 4/6/26-6/15/26, skipping the Monday of Memorial Day weekend.

Types of skills we will address direction following, emotional regulation, discussing how our bodies feel (interoception), body awareness, socializing with peers, and mental wellbeing

Attendance: you can miss up to 2 visits during the group or will have to be discharged from the group.

Please let me know by 3/6 if you would like me to register him. It goes through insurance the same way individual sessions do. I will give you a call early next week to check if you don't get this message but thought it would be helpful to see the details in writing. Let me know if you have any questions.

Mary Kate



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Session Duration



- 10 weeks
- 60 minutes
- Non-rolling admission
- After school

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Canadian Occupational Performance Measure

COPM for Yoga Group

Welcome to Yoga Group! We are excited to work with your child for the next 10 weeks in a group setting. To help us best support your child, we will do an assessment at this first visit and the final group visit to monitor progress and participation. The Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) is an individualized measure designed to detect self-perceived change in performance over time. Please respond to the following questions, on areas that will be addressed during group.

Area #1: Remains calm and focused for 10+ minutes
How well can your child do this from 1-10 (1 not able, 10 able to do extremely well):

How satisfied are you with your child's ability with this skill from 1-10 (1 not satisfied, 10 very satisfied):

_____

Area #2: Implements a strategy to calm or focus the body when needed
How well can your child do this from 1-10 (1 not able, 10 able to do extremely well):

How satisfied are you with your child's ability with this skill from 1-10 (1 not satisfied, 10 very satisfied):

_____

Area #3: Identifies body sensations (feeling hot, cold, pain, hunger, etc.)
How well can your child do this activity from 1-10 (1 not able, 10 able to do extremely well):

How satisfied are you with your child's ability with this skill from 1-10 (1 not satisfied, 10 very satisfied):

_____

Area #4: Plays turn taking games with group rules
How well can your child do this activity from 1-10 (1 not able, 10 able to do extremely well):

How satisfied are you with your child's ability with this skill from 1-10 (1 not satisfied, 10 very satisfied):

_____

Write which 2 of the four areas above are most meaningful for your child to work on:

and

Any other goals you would like for your child to work on during yoga group?

(examples: coordination, confidence, social skills, interoception, managing emotions, and more!)

(Law et al., 2014)



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COPM

Area #1: Remains calm and focused for 10+ minutes

Area #2: Implements a strategy to calm or focus the body when needed

Area #3: Identifies body sensations (feeling hot, cold, pain, hunger, etc.)

Area #4: Plays turn taking games with group rules

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The Multi-dimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness-Youth version

Below there are a list of sentences. How often do you do what the sentence says? Never? Always? Or somewhere in between? Choose a number between 0 (never) and 5 (always) to tell us how often you do what the sentence says.

		Never					Always
1.	When I am nervous I can tell where in my body the feelings come from.	0	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I can tell when I am uncomfortable in my body.	0	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I can tell where in my body I am comfortable.	0	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I can tell when my breathing changes, like if it slows down or speeds up.	0	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I ignore bad feelings in my body until they become very strong.	0	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I distract myself when I feel uncomfortable or feel pain.	0	1	2	3	4	5
7.	When I feel uncomfortable or feel pain, I try to get over it.	0	1	2	3	4	5
8.	When I feel pain in my body, I become upset.	0	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I get worried if I feel pain or if I feel uncomfortable.	0	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I can tell if I have a bad feeling in my body but I don't worry about it.	0	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I can focus on how I breathe without thinking about anything else.	0	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I can focus on the feelings in my body, even when there is a lot going on around me.	0	1	2	3	4	5
13.	When I am talking to someone, I can focus on the way I am standing or sitting.	0	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Even if I am distracted I can go back to thinking how my body feels.	0	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I can return my focus from thinking about things to feeling my body.	0	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I can pay attention to my whole body even when a part of it is in pain.	0	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I can focus on my entire body when I try.	0	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I can feel how my body changes when I am angry.	0	1	2	3	4	5
19.	When something is wrong in my life I can feel it in my body.	0	1	2	3	4	5
20.	After a peaceful moment, I can feel my body is different.	0	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I can feel that my breathing becomes free and easy when I am comfortable.	0	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I can feel how my body changes when I feel happy.	0	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I can feel calm even if there is a lot going on.	0	1	2	3	4	5
24.	When I focus on how I feel in my body, I calm down.	0	1	2	3	4	5
25.	I can use my breath to help me calm down and relax.	0	1	2	3	4	5
26.	When I am thinking too much, I can calm my mind by focusing on my body/breathing.	0	1	2	3	4	5
27.	I listen for clues from my body about my emotions.	0	1	2	3	4	5
28.	When I am upset, I take time to check how my body feels.	0	1	2	3	4	5
29.	I listen to my body to help me choose what to do.	0	1	2	3	4	5
30.	I feel good in my body.	0	1	2	3	4	5
31.	I feel my body is a safe place.	0	1	2	3	4	5
32.	I trust the way my body feels.	0	1	2	3	4	5

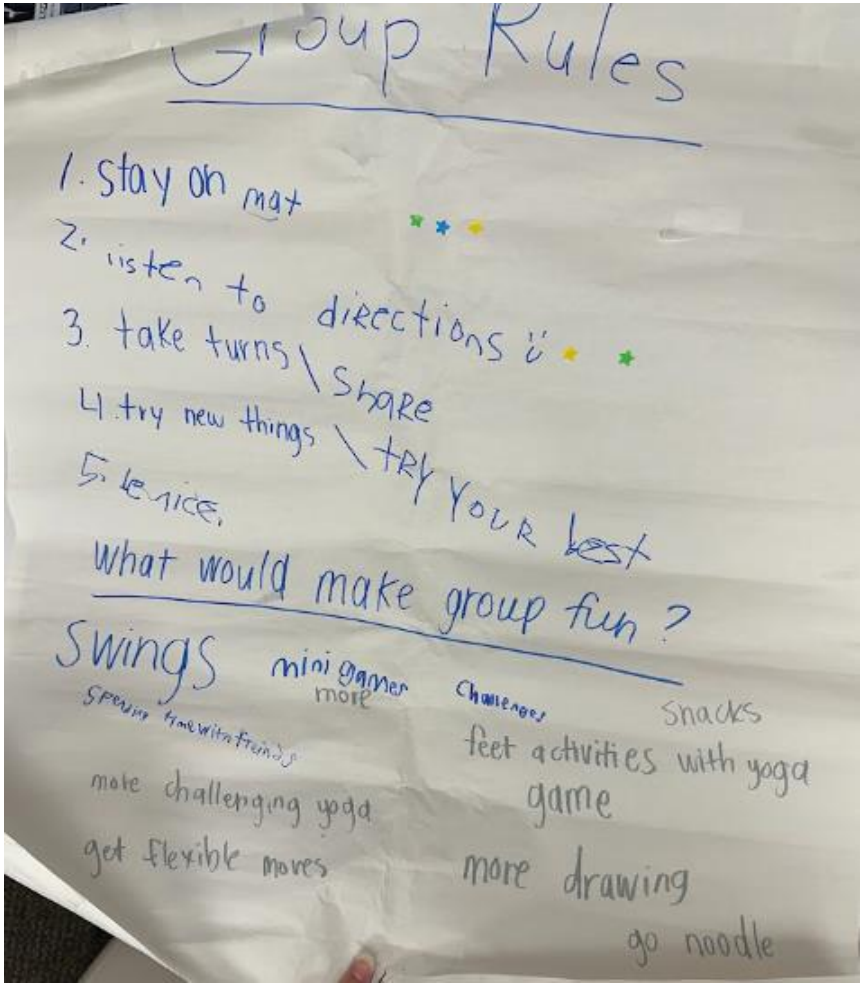
(Jones et al., 2021)

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Review Expectations Week 1

Caregiver	Patient
• Where to sit • Bathroom plan • Attendance • Home program	• Visual schedule • Group rules

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Welcome	
Yoga	
Interoception + body sensations	
My thoughts activity	
Mindfulness	
Play time and go home	

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Welcome, give schedule, group expectations	5 minutes
Yoga poses • Show me a yoga pose you know • Make up a pose based off a character	5 minutes
Interoception + yoga • Complete modified MAIA-Y. Helps to do as an obstacle course then question break.	20 minutes
CBT activity • Filling up my feelings cup	10 minutes
Mindfulness (breathing, meditation, body scan) • Snake breath	5 minutes
Closing- group game then review education with the families • Red light green light yoga pose	15 minutes

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Materials needed

- Yoga mats, printed group expectations (these will be used each week)
- Welcome: large paper, markers
- Interoception: obstacle course supplies (2 different choices of items. Ex. scooter board, foam blocks)
- CBT activity: cup and water, towels to clean up
- Mindfulness: rapper snapper tubes (optional material)

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Mindfulness

Snake breath: “Sit up straight. Take a big breath through your nose. Breath out slowly and make a hissing sound with your breath, seeing how long you can make it last. We will repeat this 5 times.”
*Variation: breath through a rapper snapper tube while moving it like a snake

Group game

Red light green light yoga pose: Play red light green light and when red light is said, show them a pose they can freeze in.

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Creating Curriculum

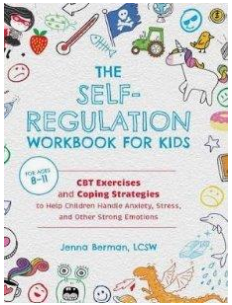
Ideas from previous yoga group

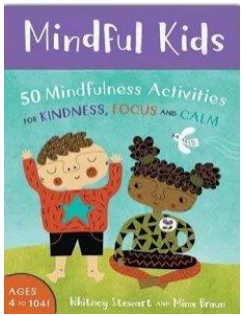
Yoga teacher experience

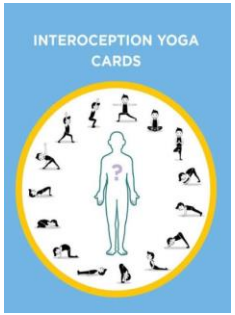
CBT Activities

Mindfulness

Interoception



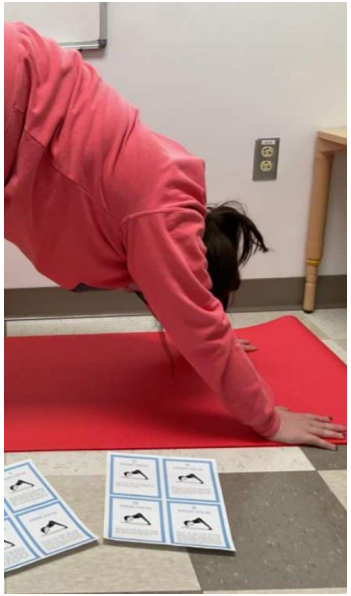




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Curriculum Activity Ideas

- 5-6 new yoga poses per session
- "How full is your cup"?
- Snake Breath
- How does your belly feel in downward dog?



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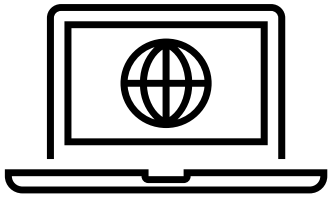


- Answer questions (4-12)
- Scroll to bottom of page
- Click submit
- Click submit another response

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Documentation

- Using same flow of documentation as 1:1
- Templates
  - Activities completed
  - Table with support level to easily be checked off for specific goal areas
  - Goal bank



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Treatment Session Focused on	Specific Activities Included
Sensory modulation	Yoga poses
Emotional regulation	Interoception yoga cards
Self-Advocacy	CBT principle focused activities
Social participation	Mindfulness and breathing exercises
Health maintenance	Group game

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Skill	Independent	Minimal Support (0-25% of opportunities)	Moderate Support (26-50% of opportunities)	Maximum Support (51-100% of opportunities)	Not Targeted
Identifies body sensations for 2+ sensations		5/18/26	4/27/26 5/4/26 5/11/26 6/1/26 6/8/26 6/15/26		4/6/26 4/13/26
Remains regulated and focused for 10+ minutes		5/18/26 6/15/26	4/6/26 4/13/26 4/27/26 5/4/26 5/11/26 6/1/26 6/8/26		
Implements a strategy to calm the body or make themselves feel better		6/8/26 6/15/26	4/6/26 4/13/26 4/27/26 5/4/26 5/11/26 5/18/26 6/1/26		
Plays turn taking group games with rules		4/6/26 5/4/26 5/11/26 5/18/26 6/1/26 6/8/26 6/15/26	4/13/26 4/27/26		

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Goal Bank Examples

- To support self-advocacy and improved understanding of sensory needs, child will identify body sensations for 2+ sensations given minimal verbal cueing (2 choices, visual supports, examples) by end of episode.
- To support sustained attention and engagement with peers at school, child will remain engaged in a shared activity with others for 10 minutes given sensory support as needed by end of episode.
- To progress knowledge of coping strategies to utilize when experiencing dysregulation at home, child will independently identify one strategy that helps their body feel regulated or comfortable by end of episode.
- To progress turn-taking skills with peers at school, child will participate in at least 2 turns of a game while following mutually understood game rules given fewer than 3 verbal cues by end of episode.
- To progress leisure exploration and opportunities for social engagement with peers in the community, child will identify 2 group games they enjoy and participate in given fewer than 3 verbal cues by end of episode.

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Overcoming Challenges



(9-12)

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Planning Overwhelm



To do:

- ❑ October 2025 Meet with Emily W to review ideas, meet with Emily R & Megan M to review ideas (outcome measures, when group could potentially happen)
  - Kelly T said to check in with my lead about: Referrals, inclusion/exclusion, space, documentation
- ❑ November 2025 Finish group curriculum (layout of each session) packet; create documentation template; caregiver handouts
- ❑ December 2025 gather list of participants for trial
- ❑ January 2026 present trial to lead meeting; reach out to trial participants

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Home Carryover

The caregiver feels they can't find the time to practice at home or to implement in routine?

- Sticker sheet
- Handout of home program choices
- Spend last 5 minutes of group verbally reviewing with caregivers
- Print pose cards, remove barriers for trying at home

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Yoga Group: Caregiver Education Week 1

What is yoga? Yoga is a combination of poses, breathing, and mindfulness.

Active poses help build strength, flexibility, balance, and muscle tone.

- Passive poses help with meditation and relaxation.
- Improves body awareness and learning to listen to how the body feels.
- Breathing slowly and deeply can bring calmness. It can decrease stress and anxiety.
- Tips for yoga at home: You do not have to have a yoga mat! You can practice yoga by sitting on a towel, on the floor, or even on the bed.

This week we:

- Yoga: talked about how we will be learning together in the group
- Group play: red light green light yoga pose to start introducing some yoga paired with direction following
- Mindfulness: talked about how our emotions are like water filling up a cup and completed a snake breathing exercise

Consider trying the following at home this week:

- Ask your child how "full" their cup is with emotions
- Snake breath: Sit up straight. Take a big breath through your nose. Breath out slowly and make a hissing sound with your breath, seeing how long you can make it last.
- Make up a yoga pose at home together
- Complete sticker chart for home practice. Put one sticker on your chart this week if you practiced one of the home suggestions at least 1x this week!

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Logistics

What if the patient is running late to the group?

What if a patient has to go to the bathroom during the group?

- Notify desk of plan for latecomers
- Clear running late policy
- Find bathroom support staff
- Have close by seating area for caregivers

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Nervous or Unsure Patients

A patient wants to come to the group but is nervous about it. Can they try it?

- Clear attendance policy
- Social story of what to expect
- Consider having space for trials

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Yoga Group

A Social Story



Yoga group is on Monday.
I will come to yoga group on Monday.





My therapist,
Mary Kate,
will lead yoga group.

Hi!
I'm
Mary Kate!



Yoga group is a time
to move our bodies,
breathe, and relax.
I can have fun and feel calm.





We will do different
yoga poses, games,
and activities.





Yoga group is a fun space.
I am proud of myself
for coming and trying!

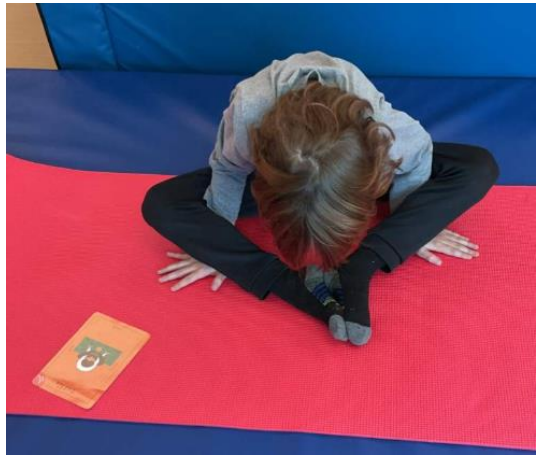


I can do this!

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Tips

- Preprinting material before groups
- Opportunity for fieldwork student support
- Take one step at a time to find a support team



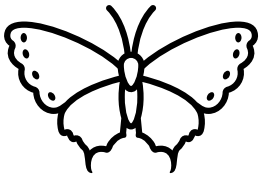


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A Special Thank You!

Jessalyn Dickerson
Megan McKim
Emily Reipenhoff
Kelly Tanner
Emily White
Lily Zucaro
OT Clinical Lead Group
Play Your Way Staff



Resources

Law, M., Baptiste, S., Carswell, A., McColl, M. A., Polatajko, H., & Pollock, N. (2014). *Canadian Occupational Performance Measure* (5th ed.). COPM Inc.

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Design Your Own OT Group

Turn your group idea into a plan!

1. What's the Need?

2. What Evidence Supports It?

3. Who Is On Your Team?

4. Group Snapshot

Group Name: _____

Population: _____

Age Range: _____ # Participants: _____

Build It!

5. Curriculum Brainstorm

Week 1: _____

Week 2: _____

Week 3: _____

Week 4: _____

Week 5: _____

Week 6: _____

6. Notes, Ideas, and Logistics Brainstorm

My First Next Step

What is ONE thing I will do in the next two weeks to move this group forward?

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Thank you!
Questions?

marykate.uebelein@nationwidechildrens.org

EVALUATION: Pivoting Care Models: Using Yoga Group Interventions to Improve Access in Pediatric Occupational

Scan QR code to submit your evaluation

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