



Mental Health & Emotional Support

Mental health in the school setting refers to a student's ability to participate in learning and daily school activities while managing emotions, stress, and expectations throughout the day. A student's mental health can be influenced by many factors, including learning differences, health conditions, past experiences, sensory needs, relationships, and daily routines such as sleep or nutrition.¹

When students feel emotionally regulated, resilient, and capable, they are better able to engage in classroom activities, interact with peers, and participate in their school occupations.

Impact on student participation

Emotional well-being plays a critical role in learning and participation at school. Challenges with mental health or emotional regulation may impact a student's ability to:

- Attend to instruction and complete schoolwork
- Manage stress, frustration, or changes in routine
- Participate in group activities or social interactions
- Transition between tasks, settings, or expectations
- Advocate for their needs or ask for help

These challenges do not reflect a lack of ability. Rather, they may indicate that a student needs additional supports to successfully engage in the school environment.

How school-based occupational therapy can help

Occupational therapy has a strong foundation in mental health practice. In schools, occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) support students' emotional well-being by focusing on self-regulation, routines, environments, and participation in daily school activities. OTPs collaborate with students, families, teachers, and other school staff to support access to learning.

OT support for mental health and emotional regulation may include:

- Evaluating sensory processing, motor skills, and executive functioning to identify factors that may affect regulation, attention, and emotional well-being¹
- Supporting self-regulation through movement, sensory strategies, and stress-reduction activities embedded into the school day¹
- Helping students achieve an optimal level of alertness and energy for learning¹

- Collaborating with teachers to modify tasks, break assignments into manageable steps, and support successful participation¹
- Identifying appropriate times and strategies for breaks to support sustained learning¹
- Using trauma-informed, mindfulness-based, and social-emotional learning approaches within classroom routines²
- Making environmental modifications to promote inclusion and emotional safety across school settings²
- Supporting resilience, self-advocacy, and emotional awareness²
- Using tools such as social stories or visual supports to help students understand and manage emotions²
- Providing psychoeducation that supports understanding of neurodiversity and individual differences²

School-based occupational therapy does not provide psychotherapy. Instead, OT focuses on helping students develop skills, strategies, and supports that allow them to participate successfully in school alongside mental health professionals and educators.

Contact

If you're interested in learning if OT services might be helpful for your child at AIM, please contact supportservices@aimpa.org.

Sources

1. American Occupational Therapy Association. *School mental health toolkit*. AOTA website. Accessed January 2026.
2. Gibbs V. *Occupational therapy and self-regulation* [webinar]. American Occupational Therapy Association; 2021.