



Observing and Participating in Your Child's Therapy

CSLOT invites parents to participate in their children's therapy because we know that therapy goes farther when parents are there to learn to do at home what therapists do in the clinic. With parental support, we expect to make greater and faster progress while taking advantage of these early years in which language and motor skills develop naturally and spontaneously.

We know that children develop language in imitation of the speakers in their environment, and we also know that there are ways to speak to children which facilitate their language development. With parents in the room, our therapists can teach parents how to speak to their children. Numerous studies have borne this out, showing that vocabulary targets taught to parents result in larger vocabularies in their children, earlier use of multi-word utterances, and earlier use of grammatical markers. In addition, other studies have shown that when parents respond verbally to their children by using language modeling techniques, they increase their child's frequency of communicative interaction.

Similarly, a parent observing occupational therapy learns how to give a child the support s/he needs for locomotion, postural development, muscle control, body coordination, fine muscle use, etc., and this support is often physical. The occupational therapist can demonstrate hands-on techniques which the parent can carry over into the home for the numerous physical tasks the child encounters daily. In the area of sensory integration, the occupational therapist can show the parent how a child behaves while being influenced by too much or too little stimulation, and how to create an environment at home or school which is friendly for the child.

However, there are times when parents are asked to observe from a distance, be it from an open door, through the observation windows, or on a monitor from a camera placed in the therapy room. In these instances, the parent becomes a non-obtrusive viewer, that is, the child does not know that his/her parent is observing and is therefore not distracted by having his/her parent in the room. The child transfers his trust to the therapist, and engages naturally with the therapist who "replaces" mommy or daddy for a short time. Children who have difficulty in separation are usually in the pre- or early developmental stages in the process of separation; other children may have behavioral problems which parents have not yet learned to manage. In either case, the therapist can help the parent with the timing and degree of separation, as well as experiment with management techniques which can then be demonstrated to the parent.

If your therapist asks you to partner with him/her in the separation process by observing from a distance, please know that the reason behind this is to increase the effectiveness of the intervention. The therapist will instruct/inform you of when it is good to observe and participate. If you hear your child crying, please do not intervene unless your therapist requests. She will call you if she or your child needs you. If you would like to observe or participate in therapy, be sure to let your therapist know and she will find the best way to make that possible.