

Illinois Developmental Therapy Association

Scope of Practice

Developmental Therapist Professional Role

How a child grows and changes from birth to 5 years of age is the most dramatic process in human development and is impacted by biological and environmental factors as well as the overlapping effects of these two. It is the role of the Developmental Therapist to understand the complex nature of the many forces that influence child development as that development progresses through natural changes over the 0-5 year period; to recognize deviance from that progression in any area of development; to comprehend the developmental importance of specific skills and the influence of those skills on other skills as well as all areas of development; to minimize a child's functional limitations by designing, implementing, and modifying therapeutic interventions for the child and the family; and to offer consultation to other therapists and professionals on confounding developmental influences affecting each area of expertise and developmentally appropriate practice for children birth to five years.

Education

Developmental Therapist

A credentialed Developmental Therapist holds a bachelor's degree or higher in Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Special Education, Special Education, Special Education: Deaf/Hard of Hearing or Blind/Partially Sighted, Child Development/Family Studies, Early Intervention, Elementary Education, Developmental Psychology, or Social Work; or a bachelor's degree or higher and a full specialist credential in an Early Intervention program; or a current license in art, music, recreation, or other type of therapy, rehabilitative or habilitative in nature, in the state where they provide services to children; and can document the completion of educational experiences as approved by the Department that include at least 2 semester college hours or the equivalent (30 clock hours or CEU credit hours) in each of the following core knowledge content areas: the Development of Young Children; Typical and Atypical; Working with Families of Young Children with Disabilities; Intervention Strategies for Young Children with Special Needs; and Assessment of Young Children with Special Needs; and can submit proof of training on the use of a formal assessment tool that would allow the provider to perform global evaluations/assessments.

Developmental Therapist/Hearing

A credentialed Developmental Therapist/Hearing (DTH) is an educator with a degree in Special Education/Deaf and Hard of Hearing and receives authorizations under the service types Aural Rehabilitation and Developmental Therapy. As Aural Rehabilitation providers, DTHs address outcomes related to information on hearing loss, amplification options, literacy, language acquisition, and communication methodologies and modes. DTHs, speech therapists and audiologists can all be authorized to provide aural rehabilitation services although aural rehabilitation services are most often provided by a DTH.

Developmental Therapist/Vision

A Developmental Therapist/Vision (DTV) is an educator who works to help a child learn and develop in spite of an identified visual impairment. A DTV holds a bachelor's degree or higher in Education for the Blind and Partially Sighted. He/She has also gone through additional training to add the early intervention credential to his/her expertise. This individual can receive authorizations under the service types Vision or Developmental Therapy.

The DTV looks at the child's skill levels and works to move him/her forward in all areas of development. They are not trying to improve vision; instead they are helping the family find ways to effectively teach the child about his world in spite of the child's visual loss. For example, literacy for a child who is blind or visually impaired must be approached in a totally different manner than with a child who has normal vision. A DTV helps families find resources related to their child's visual condition and will spend time helping the family understand the visual diagnosis and prognosis.

It is important for families to understand that a Developmental Therapist Vision is NOT a Vision Therapist. Vision therapy is a medical procedure and is not paid for by Early Intervention. Vision Therapy describes a service used primarily by optometrists to treat conditions of children or adults who typically have normal visual acuity and field but problems using their vision. The article entitled "A DTV is NOT a Vision Therapist" is available to further describe this difference.

Developmental Therapist/Orientation and Mobility

A Developmental Therapist Orientation and Mobility (DTO&M) is a specialist in the field of blindness who holds a master's degree in Orientation and Mobility. This person has met additional requirements allowing them to obtain an early intervention credential. O&M describes a discipline which focuses specifically on safe travel and spatial awareness for persons with a visual impairment. When dealing with infants and toddlers, the DTO&M will focus on body awareness, spatial understanding, and travel. Many toddlers with a visual impairment will reach an ability level in which pre-cane devices and travel techniques become necessary. This could potentially graduate to the need for training in beginning skills for white cane use for older toddlers. It is very important that a child learn correct travel techniques from the beginning. Improper or unsafe habits are almost impossible to correct once they are formed

Core Competencies

A Developmental Therapist requires a combination of knowledge and skills. A DT must demonstrate competencies in working with families and their infants and toddlers who have special needs.

1. Demonstrates an understanding of Typical and Atypical development in all domains during the early years (0-5);
2. Demonstrates an understanding of common disabilities and delays;
3. Demonstrates an understanding of medical, health and safety concerns that effect development;
4. Demonstrates and understanding of the importance of social-emotional development as the foundation for building healthy relationships with family members and peers;
5. Demonstrates an understanding of family systems and team collaboration;
6. Demonstrates respect of the cultural and linguistic differences of families;
7. Empowers families so that they can advocate and meet the needs of their infant/toddler with disabilities;
8. Implements intervention strategies that fit the family's and the child's daily routine to support the child's development in all areas;
9. Facilitates the family's support of child's participation in everyday activities;
10. Assists families in identifying community resources;
11. Demonstrates an understanding his or her roles and responsibilities as an Early Intervention service provider per State of Illinois guidelines;
12. Demonstrates an understanding of evidence-based practices in the field of Early Intervention;
13. Utilizes observation, formal and informal evaluations so that the family can better understand their child's strengths, abilities, and special needs;
14. Collaborates with other professionals/agencies serving the family;
15. Demonstrates an understanding of the role and responsibilities of the other team members working with the family and child (Service Coordinator, OT, SLP, PT, other counselors, nutritionists, physicians etc.);
16. Maintains professional ethics, as they relate to standards of practice and codes of ethics in early intervention and early childhood special education;
17. Demonstrates an understanding of local, State and Federal Early Intervention systems, regulations, and procedures;
18. Conducts formal evaluations/assessments, following evaluation tool procedures and State guidelines;
19. Maintains confidentiality, legal responsibilities, and appropriate boundaries with families;
20. Demonstrates the ability to develop the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP), and understands Part B services and the Individual Education Programs (IEP).

Clinical Practice

The functions of a Developmental Therapist are:

1. To assess global development by performing formal and informal evaluations of the seven recognized areas of development (Cognitive, Receptive Language, Expressive Language, Gross Motor, Fine Motor, Social-Emotional, and Self-Help skills) along with cultural, ethnic, social, economic, and nutritional influences in the child's environment;
2. To determine the impact of the child's sensory processing, perception, memory, temperamental characteristics, attachment, variability of cognitive and personality processes on the child's physical, cognitive and psychological development;
3. To use this information to plan and implement appropriate intervention strategies for the desired outcomes related to a child's cognitive, psychological, and social-emotional development in order to maximize independent functioning, and for establishing global developmental homeostasis;
4. To evaluate the success of those interventions and modify treatment as may be necessary to effect the desired outcomes;
5. To inform, educate, and train parents in order to prepare them to utilize the intervention strategies in their activities of daily living, and to prepare parents for their child's anticipated course of development;
6. To engage in consultation, education, and research;
7. To keep pace with rapid advances in research impacting child well-being and development, and incorporate the findings into functional applications to help children with disabilities and delays to improve their quality of life at home and in the community.