

## Occupational Therapy Pinwheel Pt. 1 (Grades 9-12)



While watching the slideshow, *Fort Stanton Helps Save the World*, you learned that Occupational Therapy was used with soldiers, with tubercular patients and with mentally disabled patients during the years that Fort Stanton served as a hospital and training school. An injury or illness can force a person to have to learn new ways to perform everyday tasks. For a person with cognitive disabilities, it can be difficult to interpret or understand sensory input and organize a response. For example, a person with cognitive impairment or traumatic brain injury might be able to recognize a spoon and fork at their place setting, but be unable to remember what it is for or how to use it.

Crafting therapy is frequently used with patients to help build and refine the motor and cognitive skills they may lack. For this activity, you will make a pinwheel. This activity might be used by an OT to enhance a patient's concentration, decision making, problem solving, attention to task, self control, motor planning, visual acuity, dexterity, grasp, bilateral coordination, sequencing, time awareness, hand strength and fine motor skills.

### Teacher Preparation:

Although it is possible to make pinwheels from traditional classroom materials, I have found it easier to order pre-made pinwheel kits from Oriental Trading Co. It reduces the time and tools needed for the activity and improves spin. [https://www.orientaltrading.com/diy-jumbo-pinwheels-a2-57\\_6390.fltr](https://www.orientaltrading.com/diy-jumbo-pinwheels-a2-57_6390.fltr)



### Materials Needed:

- pinwheel kit (one per student)
- Sharpie markers in a variety of colors (Sharpies smear less than regular markers)

### Instructions:

1. Each student will have a plastic straw handle, an axle (which fits on top of the plastic straw), a white, square piece of cardstock, 2 white, cardstock flowers, and a stopper (a small plastic piece that keeps the pinwheel from coming off the axle).
2. Instruct students that while working on this project, they should pay close attention to their **feelings and emotions**.
3. Allow students to select Sharpies and color a design of their choice on both sides of the pinwheel square. Tell students in advance that they will have 5 minutes to make their design. Remind them at 2 ½ minutes so that they don't get too focused on one side and forget to color the back. (The purpose of limiting time is to emphasize the OT skill of **time management**.)

4. Instruct students to sit on one of their hands. (This is to demonstrate the difficulty of performing a two-handed task, or **bilateral coordination**, with a physical disability. )
5. Ask students to pick up their plastic straw. While still sitting on one hand, ask students to affix the axle piece to one end of the straw. (With only one hand, students will be forced to figure out another way to accomplish this task.)
6. Instruct students to place one cardstock flower on the axle. (If you see students skipping ahead of your instructions, remind them the steps have to be done in a certain order or the pinwheel won't work. This emphasizes the OT skill of **sequencing**.)
7. Tell students that they may now use both hands. Instruct students to fit the hole in the cardstock square over the axle and slide it all the way down.
8. Instruct students to take one corner of the pinwheel and fold it inward to the center, again fitting the hole over the axle.
9. Moving to the next corner, repeat folding the corner in to the axle and fitting the hole over the axle until all four corners are secured on the axle. (It does not matter if students turn their square clockwise or counterclockwise during this step, as long as they move to the next available hole, not the hole in the opposite corner.)
10. Instruct students to push the remaining cardstock flower on to the axle.
11. Finish the pinwheel by placing the stopper on the end of the axle to hold all the pieces in place.

## Discussion

- As you blow your pinwheels, think back on the disease that brought Fort Stanton's 1936 hospital into existence. What was that disease called? (tuberculosis)
- What was usually the first sign that someone had developed tuberculosis? (a cough)
- Which of your organs is affected when you cough? (lungs)

The unique quality about Occupational Therapy is that the patient is getting therapeutic benefit without realizing it, because the mind is engaged in the act of creation. For example, a patient with a lung disease would likely work with a Respiratory Therapist who might instruct him to slowly inhale and exhale 10 times. The patient's mind would be very focused on the act of breathing in and breathing out.

Likewise, a patient who blows on a pinwheel is also breathing in and out, exercising his lungs. But instead of being focused on the exercise or the pain associated with it, he is probably distracted by the act of making the pinwheel turn and watching how the colors and design blend together when it turns.

The mental health benefit comes from the act of creating something. The patient has control over the colors he chooses and the design that he creates. For a patient stuck in a hospital room or in one of those small TB huts, these pinwheels might bring some color and fun into the environment and lift his spirits. Even on days when he didn't have the strength to blow the pinwheel, he might place it in a flowerbox and let the wind lift his spirits. That's what Occupational Therapy does...it helps fix what's physically broken as well as fixing the mind and the soul.