

# Children's Therapy Connection Newsletter

Spring 2025

Volume 29  
Issue 2



In this issue:

- Career Day..... 1
- CTC Starts..... 2
- New staff..... 3
- Physical Therapy... 4
- Occupational Therapy..... 5
- Speech Therapy..... 6-7
- Miss Sara's OT corner..... 8
- UPMC Children's services..... 9
- CTC Information..... 10

## Career Day



Alivia, a patient at UPMC Washington Children's Therapy, is a big fan of our team. For career day at school, she was so excited that she asked her mom to buy her a pair of scrubs in the same color as those worn by our therapists. Alivia is pictured above with Miss Julie, Miss Lisa, Miss Serena (a grad student), and Miss Marissa.



## Pediatric Emergency Care

The UPMC Washington Emergency Department now partners with UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh to provide high-quality emergency care for kids, right in our community.

*See page 9 to learn more about this service and other UPMC Children's services in the area.*

# CTC Superstars



**Westin**

Westin is our PT superstar. Westin attends physical therapy twice a week: once on land and once in the aquatic environment. He is improving his balance, upper and lower body strength, coordination skills, and core strength. Westin always works hard and has a smile on his face. He is making great progress in PT, accomplishing many goals and getting stronger for baseball. Westin looks forward to therapy each week and loves beating his therapists at soccer, baseball, or basketball at the end of the session. Westin, we are so proud of you and love working with you each week.

**Noah**

Noah is our speech superstar. He has been working very hard on communicating with his therapists and peers. Noah also learned to communicate with the LAMP program and is practicing how to produce new sounds and words each week. As he focused on his speech, he loves to play with all the vehicles from the movie "Cars." We are all so proud of how far you have come, Noah. You are one amazing star.



**Gauge**

Gauge is our OT superstar. Over the past few years, he has made amazing progress. Every week, Gauge works hard to improve his range of motion, grasp, and feeding skills. He can now hold a juice box and is learning to use a fork. Gauge enjoys therapeutic activities like crafts, coloring, and games. His family is very supportive, reinforcing his progress outside of therapy. Gauge's positivity and determination brighten every session. Congratulations on all your hard work. Miss Jess and Miss Melissa are so proud of you.



# New Staff Members



**Faith F.**  
Speech/Language Pathologist

Faith is a licensed speech-language therapist who was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pa. She received her bachelor's in communication sciences and disorders from Ohio University, where she also gained speech science research experience. Faith stayed at Ohio University to complete her master's in speech-language pathology. She has previous experience working with children as a speech therapist in a K-8 school setting. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, cooking, being active outside, and traveling. She is excited to be a part of the UPMC Washington Children's Therapy Center team as a full-time therapist and looks forward to getting to know all of the wonderful children and families here.



**Karlie M.**  
Occupational Therapist

Karlie is an occupational therapist who earned her doctorate in occupational therapy from Duquesne University. While completing her doctorate, she worked to educate her colleagues on the physical and psychological needs of individuals with type 1 diabetes, as she has lived with it herself for 17 years. She has previous experience in pediatrics as an occupational therapist at Reach for Speech. In her free time, Karlie enjoys reading, playing board games, watching the latest reality TV shows, and hanging out with her cats, Evie and Nova. She can't wait to join the team and grow her skills with new families.

**WELCOME**



# Physical Therapy

## Gone Swimming: Aquatic therapy

By: Mr. Nate, PT, DPT



### What is Aquatic Therapy?

In simple terms, aquatic therapy is PT in a heated, therapy pool. A pool is an excellent treatment space for children of all ages and backgrounds due to the simple fact that most kids love playing in water. Aquatic therapy harnesses the basic properties of water to effectively challenge a child's strength, balance, coordination, range of motion, and endurance. Many foundational skills, such as standing and walking, can be practiced in the pool to improve performance on land.

### The Power of Water:

Thanks to buoyancy, or the upward force that causes an object to float, water provides an exercise environment that is ideal for children with developmental disabilities or physical restrictions.

### Advantages to Aquatic Therapy vs. Land Therapy:

- Decreased weight-bearing requirements
- Reduced discomfort with exercise due to reduced joint load
- Reduced effects of gravity and less balance control required
- Better tolerance for stretching
- Improved circulation
- Less muscle tightness
- Less resistance to trying challenging activities
- Increased confidence and overall participation: Water = Fun!

### Physical Benefits from Treatment:

- Increased joint range of motion and muscle flexibility
- Increased strength
- Increased tactile input from force of water for improved sensory processing
- Improved cardiovascular function
- Stress reduction and pain relief
- Achievement of gross motor milestones



# Occupational Therapy

## Food Jags

By: Miss Ellen, OTR/L

Does your child prefer to eat the same food prepared in the same way at every meal? This is known as a food jag. The primary issue with food jags is that children will eventually get burned out or bored of these preferred foods and stop accepting them in their diet. This is especially challenging for children who have very limited foods in their food repertoire to begin with.

This article will share some helpful tips to prevent food jags and avoid eliminating foods from your child's diet.

Start by alternating their preferred foods when possible, or try to avoid offering the same food on consecutive days. For example, if your child eats chicken nuggets and pizza, serve chicken nuggets for dinner one night and pizza the next.

Don't worry if your child doesn't eat a wide enough variety of foods to alternate preferred foods; there are still other strategies you can use.

Try making a small change to the sensory property within the food each time you serve it. It is important to keep this change subtle—enough for your child to notice the change, but not enough that they are resistant to eating it.



Examples of subtle food changes include:

- Shape: Use cookie cutters to make a subtle and fun change.
- Color: Add a few drops of food coloring to make it look slightly different.
- Brand: Try a different but similar brand of the preferred food.
- Texture: Cook the food so that it is just a little crisper or softer.
- Taste: Add a new flavoring to the food, such as garlic, lemon, or cinnamon.

The most important trick is to make it fun. Have your child participate in the process. Provide them with choices when possible to allow them to have some autonomy with the food preparation. For example, if you are having toast for breakfast, ask them if you should cut it into squares or triangles.

These subtle changes will help your picky eater learn that food can look different but still be okay. This will also gradually build up to your child's acceptance of a new variety of foods

Remember to always have a safe food present at each meal. Continue to offer small portions of new foods for consistent exposure to new flavors and textures.

Don't wait to seek help. If you have a picky eater who is losing foods due to food jags, schedule an occupational therapy evaluation. We can help you develop a plan to reduce stress at mealtimes and make it more enjoyable for your child, you, and your family.

# Speech Therapy

## Pretend Play

By: Miss Julie, MS, CCC/SLP

Pretend play is a valuable tool in building speech and language skills. It encourages vocabulary, language, and social skills along with imagination and role-playing. Pretend play typically begins to appear around 18 to 24 months. The four types of pretend play are:

### Imitative play

(may start around 13 to 18 months)

When your toddler puts a blanket over a doll or babbles while flipping through a board book, they are engaging in early imitative play. This type of pretend play involves mimicking actions they observe, revealing their growing cognitive and memory skills as they remember, and reenacting what they see you do.

### Symbolic play

(may start around 18 to 24 months)

Using one object to represent another signals a cognitive leap known as symbolic play. For example, your child might fill a bowl with small blocks and pretend it's soup. They understand that blocks are typically used for building, but can also represent something entirely different, like food. This concept is similar to how letters represent sounds and words can convey abstract ideas, like love.



### Dramatic play

(may start around 2.5 to 3 years)

When your child starts reenacting whole scenes from life, such as their bedtime routine with a teddy bear, they enter a stage called dramatic play. This indicates a cognitive shift, as they can now remember the sequence of steps in a routine. Dramatic play becomes more elaborate over time, with scenarios like "going to the doctor" after a recent visit, using a stuffed animal or even you as the patient. Little figures or peg dolls can be used for "small world play." The more your child engages in dramatic play, the more they practice taking the perspective of others.

### Fantasy play

(may start around 4 years old)

As your child's play becomes more complex, they may start engaging in unrealistic play, such as pretending to be a superhero saving the world or a dinosaur stomping around ancient Earth. This type of fantasy play marks a cognitive leap, as your child imagines scenes they have never experienced, moving closer to understanding abstract ideas and concepts. In fantasy play, children often experiment with rules and powerful roles. Whether playing with friends or alone, they practice taking turns, resolving conflicts, and other social skills.

# Speech Therapy

## Pretend Play

Continued from page 5

### Here is How Pretend Play Enhances Speech and Language Development

#### Language Understanding and Use:

- Pretend play provides opportunities for children to use language in various contexts, expanding their vocabulary and grammar.
- Children naturally use higher levels of language when acting out different roles, such as pretending to be an adult or a character in a story.
- Engaging in pretend play helps children to learn new words or phrases, and even how to use them correctly.

#### Social Skills:

- Pretend play fosters social skills like turn-taking, cooperation, and perspective-taking.
- Children learn to interact with others in a meaningful way and to understand the perspectives of others.
- Pretend play with peers also can support the development of prosocial skills like friendship formation.

#### Cognitive Development:

- Pretend play helps children develop their understanding of the world around them and how to think symbolically.
- It allows children to explore different roles and scenarios and how to experiment with different ways of being.
- Pretend play is an early manifestation of a child's theory of mind, which involves the recognition of mental states in oneself and others.

#### Therapy Applications:

- Speech/Language Pathologists (SLPs) often incorporate pretend play into their therapy sessions to support language development.
- SLPs can use pretend play to target specific language skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, and narrative skills.
- Examples of pretend play activities in therapy include role-playing, storytelling, and using props to simulate real-life scenarios.

#### Examples of Pretend Play Activities:

- Role-playing: Children can pretend to be different characters, such as a teacher, a doctor, or a superhero.
- Storytelling: Children can create their own stories using props and characters. Then they can retell them to others.
- Simulating real life situations: Children can pretend to cook a meal, go shopping, visit the doctor, or teach a class.
- Using props: Children can use objects to represent other objects, such as using a block as a phone or a fork to brush a doll's hair.

Embracing pretend play is a fantastic way to nurture your child's language development, creativity, social skills, and problem-solving abilities. Pretend play helps children develop critical thinking skills, cooperation, and negotiation skills, all while allowing them a chance to process emotions and develop coping mechanisms. Fostering a love for learning and imagination encourages your child to build lifelong skills and allows you to create memories while helping your child to thrive.

# Miss Sara's OT Activity Corner

## Spring into Fun!

Warm weather is approaching so it's time to plan for fun, outdoor activities. Here are a few activities you can do with your kids to promote their OT skills.

### Activity 1: DIY Bird Feeder

This is a fun activity that can be done indoors or outdoors.

Materials Needed:

- Pinecones (search for these outside)
- Bird seed
- Peanut butter
- String or yarn

Instructions:

1. Attach a piece of string to the top of a pinecone, creating a loop for hanging.
2. Spread peanut butter all over the pinecone.
3. Roll the peanut butter-covered pinecone in bird seed until it's well-coated.
4. Hang the pinecone outside for the birds to enjoy!

This activity helps with utensil use, sensory processing, and fine motor skills.

*Note: This activity involves peanut butter and is not recommended for those with peanut allergies.*



### Activity 2: Branch Painting

Explore outside to find various branches or sticks. Once you have your materials, grab some washable paint and paint brushes. You can paint the sticks either inside or outside. This activity helps improve fine motor and visual motor skills.

### Activity 3: Pom Pom Drop

For this activity, save your paper towel and toilet paper rolls. Begin with a large piece of poster board, wood, or cardboard. Use the tape to attach the rolls. Give your child a container of craft pom poms to place into the tubes and let the fun begin. To make it more challenging, ask them to use tongs to grab the pom poms or have them name the colors of each pom poms. They can even help put together a 'path' with the rolls.



### Activity 4: Paint the Cars/Toys

Gather cars or toys and place them into a bin with a piece of paper on the bottom. Provide washable paint and paint brushes. To address sensory goals, turn this into a finger-painting activity or have a car and toy wash when they are finished painting. This activity supports appropriate grasp on a writing tool, color recognition, eye-hand coordination, and bilateral coordination.



*\*\*Children should be supervised when completing these activities for safety purposes.\*\**



## UPMC Children's: We're Here and Growing!

Families in Washington, and nearby areas have easy access to top-rated children's health care. UPMC Washington partners with UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh — a hospital nationally ranked in 11 pediatric specialties by U.S. News & World Report for 2024-2025 — to bring expert care closer to home. Through this partnership, families can get care from those same experts without needing to travel far.

- The emergency department at UPMC Washington partners with UPMC Children's to provide high-quality emergency care for kids, right in your community.
- At UPMC Children's Specialty Care Center in UPMC Washington, children can see doctors who specialize in pediatric cardiology, endocrinology, gastroenterology, nephrology, neurology, orthopaedics, urology, and Down Syndrome. To make an appointment, call 412-692-7337.
- When your regular pediatrician's office is closed, UPMC Children's Express Care at UPMC Washington is open evenings, weekends, and holidays to treat minor injuries and illnesses. You can check wait times, hold your spot in line, or schedule a video visit at [CHP.edu/Express](https://www.chp.edu/Express).

The UPMC Specialty and Express Care offices are next to the emergency department at UPMC Washington, located at 155 Wilson Avenue in Washington.

**UPMC Children's is proud to grow in this community — delivering trusted care for kids, right where families live.**

# Information

## Freedom Transit



Families of CTC may be eligible for reimbursement of travel costs to the Children's Therapy Center. If your child receives Medical Assistance call 1-800-331-5058 to inquire whether you qualify for this service.

To view the reimbursement form:

[https://www.freedom-transit.org/forms/MATP-Reimbursement-Form-5\\_26\\_16.pdf](https://www.freedom-transit.org/forms/MATP-Reimbursement-Form-5_26_16.pdf)

## Free Diapers, Pull-ups and Wipes

**Where:** The Diaper Pantry  
Peters Creek Baptist Church  
6300 Library Rd., South Park

**When:** Every 3rd Saturday of the month

**Time:** 9 a.m. to Noon.

**Other Donations Provided:** New and gently used baby/children's clothing, baby equipment, toys, etc.

### Contact Information:

DIAPERPANTRY@PCBC.CHURCH and found on Facebook.



Follow us on social media  
[facebook.com/UPMCWashington](https://facebook.com/UPMCWashington)

CTC is proud to partner with



United Way  
of Washington County



## Health Insurance

Reminder: If your child's health insurance has changed, please inform us.

# UPMC WASHINGTON

## CHILDREN'S THERAPY

Office locations:

1000 Waterdam Plaza Drive,  
Suite 120  
McMurray, PA 15317

289 North Avenue.  
Washington, PA 15301