

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS' CONTRIBUTION DURING THIS PANDEMIC: SUPPORTING YOU IN TIMES OF OCCUPATIONAL DISRUPTION

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Occupational therapy: health, well-being and quality of life through meaningful occupations

The situation we are currently experiencing brings us many upheavals in our usual occupations, such as: gaps between the time actually spent on activities and the time desired, deprivation of certain activities that are important to us, imbalance between imposed activities and chosen activities, etc.

At the same time, we have an opportunity to rediscover that daily life has a richness that is often overlooked or minimized in "normal" times. Life at home contains occupational opportunities that are conducive to experiences that support or sometimes even hinder our health, well-being and quality of life.

Scientific studies have shown that certain aspects expressed in the pursuit of one or more activities contribute to our health and well-being, especially:

- 1. Activating our body, mind and senses**
- 2. Connecting with others**
- 3. Contributing to our community**
- 4. Taking care of ourself**
- 5. Developing and expressing our personal identity**
- 6. Developing our capabilities and potential**
- 7. Experiencing pleasure and joy**
- 8. Building our prosperity and security**

Here, the key is to think about your repertoire of activities and that it is the VARIETY, the broad range that supports health and wellbeing. So, there is no prescription here of what you could do and at what dosage, it is up to you to determine this. You are the expert of your life.

Give yourself a space to reflect and explain to yourself or to people close to you how your activity patterns are disrupted

In a typical day, what occupations do you accomplish currently to...

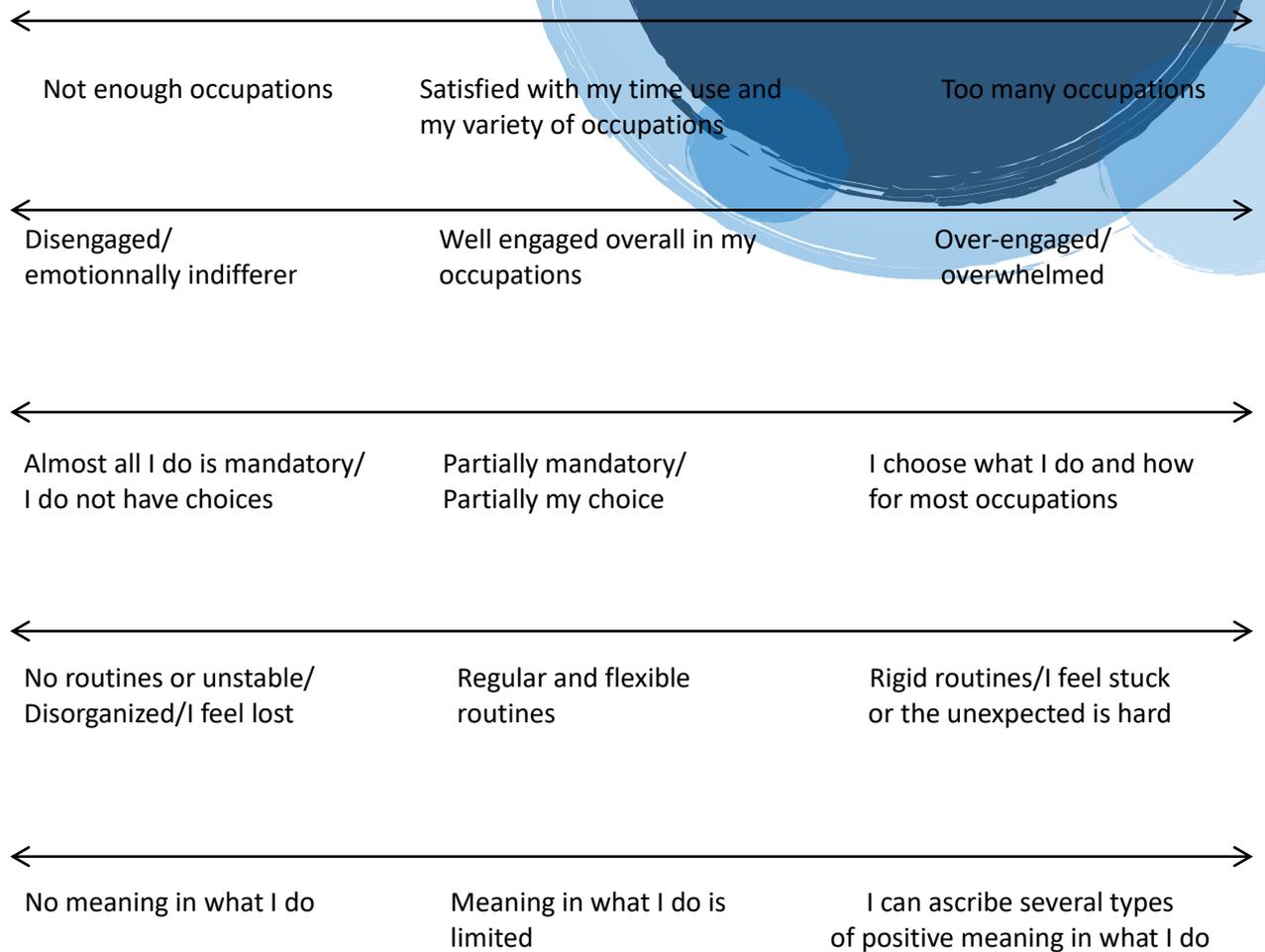
- Take care of your needs, your overall health?
- Take care of your home?
- Take care of other people (or other living things)?
- Get physically active?
- Stimulate yourself intellectually?
- Reduce your mental load?
- Stimulate your senses: vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste?
- Soothe you? Comfort you?
- Recharge/Reenergize yourself?
- Have fun, to feel joy?
- Learn?
- Express who you are (your qualities, talents, interests)?
- Express what you feel?
- Create?
- Challenge yourself?
- Feel useful?
- Feel productive, efficient?
- Connect with people? Socialize?
- Cultivate your sense of belonging?
- Contribute to our society (time, \$, service, advice)?
- Feel connected to life?

It is very important here to clarify that this reflection on your activities is not intended to make you think that you should do EVERYTHING that you listed above for your health and well-being. The essence here is that you become more aware of a few things. For example: 1) that even in an activity that is usually considered trivial, there are benefits; 2) that it is the variety of activities, which are opportunities for experiences, that allows you to touch more dimensions; 3) that an activity can have several benefits.

In addition, scientific evidence suggests that these following dimensions are also important to consider when thinking about your activity patterns:

- 1- **Sense of engagement in our activities**
- 2- **Balance: Satisfaction with the use of your time as well as the notion that what I do is congruent with what is important to me and who I am**
- 3- **Meaning: What does this activity represent for me? What images come to mind when I think of this activity?**
For e.g. picking up my leaves = outdoor activity to move around and be in nature; cleaning my yard = taking care of my house; it is a burden because it requires effort and may cause back pain etc.
- 4- **Choosing and controlling what I do and how I do it**
- 5- **Routines: Habits and rituals**

Here is a way for you to situate yourself on these aspects based, for example, on your last two weeks:



Finally, take the time to look at your current environment and context, to see what makes it easier and what makes it harder to carry out your occupations.

Some examples: The layout of my home is not adapted to my new needs; lack of financial resources; too many requests from my immediate supervisor; I have people I can count on; I have access to delivery services.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT		SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	
What supports accomplishment of my occupations	What limits accomplishment of my occupations	What supports accomplishment of my occupations	What limits accomplishment of my occupations

Based on your reflection and analysis of your daily life, organize the changes you wish to make in order to reduce the negative impacts you feel on your physical and psychological health.

- Don't forget to highlight what is going well and what you like about your current daily schedule.
- Before you set out what you want to improve, it is a good idea to establish simple, concrete, realistic and measurable goals. Putting them in writing and in a visual way can also help. Ranking your goals by level of importance can also help you prioritize and spread out over time.
- Observe the strategies that work for you or that resonates:
Some people like *advice*; for others, it will be *observing another person*; for others, it will be *trial and error*; for others, it will be *dividing the activity into steps*; for others, it will be *making a weekly schedule in an agenda*; for others, it will be *drawing on past experiences*; for others, it will be *delegating*; for some, it will be giving themselves *key phrases to remember* what you want to change.

What's important is to:

- **Reduce the gap between "what you want to do and what is important to you" and "the barriers to doing these activities and occupations", in a context where we do not have access to all the usual opportunities.**
- **Cultivate your sense of engagement in your activities. This is central to support health and wellness.**
- **Be as connected as possible to the present moment (even if it is not always easy).**
- **Remain indulgent with yourself. It's not a failure if it didn't work, but a source of learning.**
- **Do not put pressure on yourself. There is not ONE right balance to achieve.**
- **Do not hesitate to ask for help, if you have concerns and needs that require consulting a service provider. We all stand together in this common difficult time.**

To conclude, here are two quotes to make some sense in the current disruption:

"Alternating states of stability and transition constitute life span development " (Levinson, 1986).

"Physical or emotional discomfort is a positive signal that change is needed to grow, that higher adaptation is possible - humans have the capacity to bounce back" (Bussolari and Goodell, 2009).

Some scientific references related to this document :

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- 2- Eklund, M, Orban, K., Argentzell, E., Bejerholm, U., Tjörnstrand, C., Erlandsson, LK & Håkansson, C. (2017). The linkage between patterns of daily occupations and occupational balance: Applications within occupational science and occupational therapy practice, *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 24:1, 41-56, DOI: 10.1080/11038128.2016.1224271
- 3- Gewurtz, R., Moll, S., Letts, L., Larivière, N., Levasseur, M. & Krupa, T. (2016). What you do every day matters: A new direction for health promotion. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 107(2):e1–e4. doi: 10.17269/CJPH.107.5317.
- 4- Kennedy, J., & Davis, J. A. (2017). Clarifying the Construct of Occupational Engagement for Occupational Therapy Practice. *OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health*, 37(2), 98–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1539449216688201>
- 5- Larivière, N. (2014). Appuyer sa pratique ergothérapeutique avec les sciences de l'occupation. Dans M.-H. Izard, *Expériences en ergothérapie: vingt-septième série*. Montpellier, France : Sauramps médical.
- 6- Moll, SE, Gewurtz, RE, Krupa, TM, Law, MC, Larivière, N, et Levasseur, M. (2015). "Do-Live-Well": A Canadian framework for promoting occupation, health, and well-being:"Vivez-Bien-Votre Vie": un cadre de référence canadien pour promouvoir l'occupation, la santé et le bien-être. *Revue canadienne d'ergothérapie*. 82(1): 9-23.

Website :

Do Live Well framework : <https://dolivewell.ca/>