

Emerge



A Child's Place

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Occupational Therapy
Speech Therapy

Chapel Hill Office
205 Sage Rd, Ste 203
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Phone: (919) 928-0204
Fax: (919) 928-9423

Durham Office
2919 Colony Rd
Durham, NC 27705
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How International Adoption Relates to Motor Skills & Behavior



Bonnie Hacker, OT
Founder / Director

Foreign orphanages, baby homes, and other institutional settings are being linked with a number of developmental problems for international adoptees.¹ The State of the Children Report from 2002 to 2005 shows that 73% of today's international adoptees spent some time in an institutional setting.² In April of 2007, Emerge distributed an article discussing the speech and language related difficulties more common among international adoptees. The situation in many foreign orphanages has also been connected with delays in fine motor skills, gross motor skills, social behavior, memory, and specific problem solving skills. In these areas, evaluation and treatment from pediatric occupational therapists can help.

Various authors have described some foreign orphanages as having poorly trained personnel and inadequate caregiver to child ratios.³⁻⁵ Caregivers may change frequently. Problems such as having children constantly contained in cribs or play pens or having children tethered to beds or potty chairs have been described.³ Inadequate play time, inadequate freedom for movement, lack of consistency among caregivers, no access to toys, and increased risk of health problems can result in children missing important developmental milestones and in children developing problematic adaptive behaviors.

Firstly, with the high prevalence of developmental delay and sensory integration disorders among international adoptees, **an initial developmental assessment for any international adoptee would be prudent.** A developmental assessment such as one available at Emerge will compare children to developmental milestones in physical abilities, communication skills, and behavior. It is important that parents raise international adoptees according to their developmental age rather than their chronological age and that parents be prepared for some of the challenges that individual children may present. Identification of delays in development and behavior have been found to be beneficial for both the child and the parent.^{6,7}

Pediatric occupational therapy at Emerge - A Child's Place can prove beneficial for children with any of the challenges listed below. It should not be assumed that children will simply outgrow these challenges, as this is often not the case.³ These are some of the difficulties commonly associated with international adoptees who have spent time in institutions.

- Overly passive
- Prone to sensory overload: fear of large rooms, dislikes moving between floor surfaces, dislikes too many toys about, dislikes rooms with bright wall colors, agitated by multiple adults in the room at once, dislikes changing positions, etc.
- Lacks age appropriate social skills: cooperation, leadership, empathy, tolerance, turn taking, etc.
- Lacks age appropriate problem solving skills: persistence, sequencing, memory, planning. Some research suggests that problem solving difficulties among international adoptees are very specific and discrete (i.e. the ability to change strategies as the problem changes).⁸
- Stereotomies: highly repetitive behavior such as rocking or hand flapping
- Motor delays and/or awkwardness: Most children adopted internationally will demonstrate mild motor delays. However, these should resolve quickly. Children who demonstrate persistent motor control difficulties such as difficulty with balance, motor planning, or bilateral coordination should be considered for pediatric occupational therapy.
- Sensory seeking behaviors (due to sensory deprivation): "on the go," touching everything, eating anything, mouthing, invades others' space, etc.



Affordable Care at Emerge - A Child's Place

Many parents find that insurance coverage for pediatric occupational or speech therapy is often limited. In these cases, Emerge has even more to offer in addition to uncompromising quality of care and excellent facilities. The rates at Emerge are designed with the knowledge that many families pay for these services from private funds. Even though the quality of care at Emerge is at the highest levels, you will find the fees at Emerge to be the most affordable.

**Please tell parents about Emerge - A Child's Place
Believing in a Child's Potential to Flourish**

References

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