

# COVID-19

## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS: ESSENTIAL TO MENTAL HEALTH



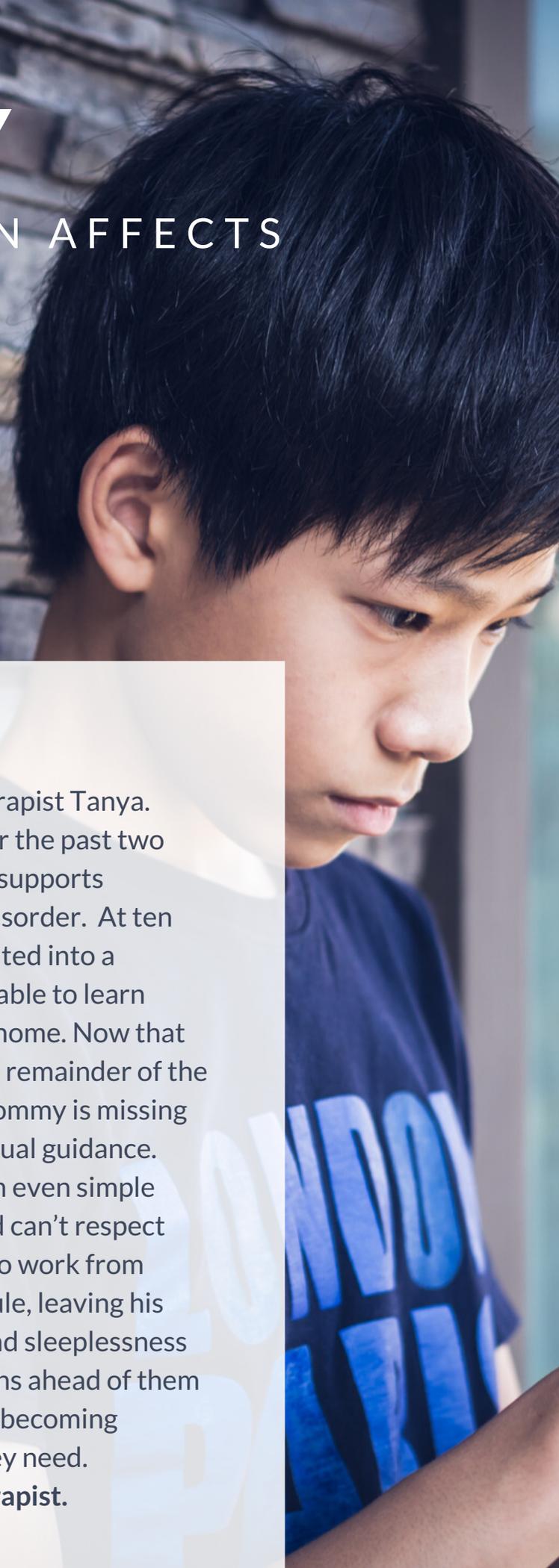
Occupational therapists, or OTs, are essential to addressing mental health issues, with extensive skills and knowledge that are relevant and needed for the toll that this pandemic is exacting from Canadians – during the crisis and in its aftermath. OTs are poised to take action on overcoming the disruption that COVID-19 has brought to everyday lives and emotional well-being. Occupational therapy is a low cost, high impact solution that needs inclusion and funding as Canada starts its long recovery. We're all in this together. **Occupational therapists are essential to mental health.**

# CASE STUDY

## FAMILY DISRUPTION AFFECTS EVERYONE

### TOMMY

misses his in-class sessions with occupational therapist Tanya. Tanya has been working with Tommy regularly for the past two years and has helped him establish a routine that supports his particular needs related to autism spectrum disorder. At ten years of age, Tommy has been able to stay integrated into a classroom with his peers, and his family has been able to learn some of the strategies to help him cope better at home. Now that the pandemic has caused school lockdown for the remainder of the school year, Tanya's services have been cut off. Tommy is missing her, feeling victimized and anxious without her usual guidance. He is acting out terribly, becoming frustrated with even simple tasks at home, unable to control his emotions, and can't respect barriers like a closed door that allow his parents to work from home. He has disrupted the whole family's schedule, leaving his parents and younger siblings in a state of upset and sleeplessness that is affecting everyone's wellbeing. With months ahead of them before school reopens, and with therapy services becoming accessible again, Tommy's parents know what they need. **Tommy and his family need an occupational therapist.**





## DISRUPTION AFFECTS EVERY MEMBER

of a household, exacerbated by close quarters, limited access to usual and desired activities and the extra energy needed to support a high-needs family member.

Here is some of what an occupational therapist, or 'OT', can do for Tommy and his family:

- Meet with Tommy's parents one on one to help them understand what his behaviour is communicating, provide education on the concept of stress, and identify ways Tommy (and other members of the family) can release frustration that are appropriate and specific to their family culture and physical space.
- Determine the capacity of his parents to learn and implement cognitive strategies for themselves and Tommy including: matching the size of reaction to the size of problem, making a visual 'map' of the impact Tommy's actions have on others and how what he does makes others feel.
- Help Tommy and his parents establish a firm and predictable daily routine, including developing rules about respecting what his parents are doing when the door is closed.
- Encourage a bedtime routine to improve sleep for Tommy that includes no screen time before bed, and comforts like a weighted blanket, soothing music or white noise and stuffies.
- Work with Tommy and his parents to set up activities and a visual schedule for Tommy during the times when his parents are not available to be with him physically.
- Encourage Tommy's parents to take photos of him doing what is expected, and use these to make a book or social story which offers comfort and enables Tommy to understand the expectations they have for him within the home environment.
- Finally, set up a designated working space for Tommy with flexible but supported seating for completing schoolwork, for example a wedged wobble seat or chair ball and room to stand or lay on his tummy for a break from sitting.

**We're all in this together. Occupational therapists are essential to mental health.**