



FUNCTIONAL ADULT OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Free Resource Pack

5 functional, adult-appropriate activity ideas for adults with intellectual disabilities

Simple • Respectful • Low-arousal • Real-life skill focused

Who this pack is for?

Occupational therapists, Occupational Therapy Students, caregivers, support staff, families and residential-care teams who need practical, meaningful activity ideas that preserve dignity and support participation.

Designed as a starter pack for everyday use

Welcome

Functional Adult OT is built around a simple belief: activity should not just keep adults “busy”. It should create opportunities for participation, independence, routine, contribution, connection and success.

This free pack includes five low-cost activities using everyday items. Each activity is designed to be adult-appropriate, practical and easy to adapt depending on the person's abilities, mood, communication style and support needs.

Core approach

Focus on participation before perfection. The goal is not to complete a task exactly like everyone else. The goal is to support meaningful involvement in real-life occupations.

How to use this pack

- Choose one activity that fits the person's current energy level, routine and interests.
- Prepare the space before inviting the person to participate.
- Use short, clear instructions and demonstrate where needed.
- Offer choices to support autonomy, even when the task is simple.
- Reduce background noise, rushing and unnecessary correction.
- End by naming the person's contribution, for example: “You helped get lunch ready.”

Important note and disclaimer

This pack is intended as a general educational and practical resource. It does not replace individual occupational therapy assessment, clinical reasoning, safeguarding procedures, medical advice, behavioural support planning or facility-specific policies.

Always consider the person's communication needs, sensory profile, medical history, swallowing safety, behaviour support plan, mobility, trauma history, risk profile and personal preferences before introducing an activity.

Use with dignity

Adults with intellectual disabilities deserve meaningful, age-respectful opportunities to participate in daily life. Activities should be adapted to the person, not forced onto the person.

Quick activity planning guide

Activity	Main focus	Best for	Support level
Setting the table	Sequencing, routine, contribution	Mealtime preparation	Low to moderate
Sorting laundry	Categorisation, domestic skills	Structured seated/standing task	Low to high
Snack plate	Choice-making, meal prep	Independence and autonomy	Moderate
Plant care	Leisure, responsibility, regulation	Calming purposeful task	Low to moderate
Care basket	Hygiene routine, body awareness	ADL routine preparation	Moderate to high

Low-arousal reminder

Keep the activity predictable, calm and contained. Avoid too many choices at once. Use a warm tone, minimal verbal overload and gentle prompting.

Activity 1: Setting the table

Purpose

Supports sequencing, attention, mealtime routine participation, bilateral hand use and contribution to the shared environment.

You will need

- Plates, cups and cutlery
- Placemats or napkins if available
- A clear table space
- A visual example or completed place setting if useful

Step-by-step

1. Prepare the items in a small pile or tray.
2. Show the person the table or visual example.
3. Give one item at a time or allow the person to choose where to start.
4. Prompt placement of each item using short instructions.
5. Invite the person to check what is missing.
6. End by acknowledging their contribution to the meal routine.

How to grade the activity

Make it easier	Make it harder
Set for one person only.	Set for two to four people.
Use one item at a time.	Sort forks, knives and spoons first.
Place items close to the correct position.	Ask the person to identify missing items.
Use a visual model.	Add a wiping-the-table step.

Low-arousal tips	Keep the table area uncluttered. Avoid correcting every placement error. Rather model gently or say, "Let's check the picture together."
Staff/caregiver role	Support success without taking over. Offer choices, demonstrate when needed and allow extra time for processing.
Functional outcome to notice	Look for increased initiation, routine familiarity, willingness to help and tolerance of mealtime preparation.

Activity 2: Sorting laundry by color/item

Purpose

Supports domestic skills, categorisation, visual discrimination, attention, functional participation and responsibility within a daily routine.

You will need

- A small basket of clean laundry
- Two or three sorting baskets or labelled spaces
- Optional labels or picture cards
- A quiet table or floor space

Step-by-step

1. Place a small amount of laundry in front of the person.
2. Explain the sorting goal: colours, towels versus clothes, or socks versus shirts.
3. Demonstrate one example.
4. Allow the person to sort the next item.
5. Use simple prompts such as “same colour” or “towels here”.
6. Finish by folding or packing away one category if appropriate.

How to grade the activity

Make it easier	Make it harder
Use only two categories.	Use three or more categories.
Use larger items such as towels.	Pair socks together.
Sort by obvious colors.	Fold simple items after sorting.
Work seated with a small basket.	Deliver items to the correct room or shelf.

Low-arousal tips	Avoid dumping a large pile of laundry onto the table. A smaller quantity is less overwhelming and gives a clearer sense of completion.
Staff/caregiver role	Create a calm, contained task. Give enough help for the person to feel successful, but leave space for independent decision-making.
Functional outcome to notice	Look for task persistence, categorisation ability, confidence with domestic routines and participation in household contribution.

Activity 3: Making a simple snack plate

Purpose

Supports choice-making, meal preparation, fine motor control, sequencing, independence and participation in self-care routines.

You will need

- A plate or small tray
- Two to four snack options
- Tongs, spoon or butter knife if appropriate
- Serviettes and handwashing access

Step-by-step

1. Wash hands or offer hand wipes.
2. Show the snack options and offer a simple choice.
3. Ask the person to place selected items on the plate.
4. Support spreading, scooping or arranging if appropriate.
5. Encourage the person to carry the plate to the table if safe.
6. End by naming the choice they made, and the task completed.

How to grade the activity

Make it easier	Make it harder
Offer only two choices.	Prepare for someone else too.
Pre-cut food items.	Add counting or portioning instructions.
Use hand-over-hand support only if needed.	Let the person choose the layout.
Use a non-slip mat under the plate.	Include a clean-up step.

Low-arousal tips	Keep food choices simple and avoid rushing. Too many options can increase anxiety or decision fatigue.
Staff/caregiver role	Support safe food handling and hygiene. Monitor choking risk, allergies and any dietary instructions.
Functional outcome to notice	Look for choice-making, initiation, safe participation, pride in preparation and increased independence in snack routines.

Activity 4: Watering plants or garden care

Purpose

Supports leisure engagement, responsibility, sensory regulation, motor planning, routine participation and connection with nature.

You will need

- Watering can, spray bottle or cup
- Indoor or outdoor plants
- Cloth for spills
- Optional gloves
- A clear route with safe footing

Step-by-step

1. Fill the watering can or spray bottle together.
2. Show which plants need water.
3. Demonstrate how much water to give.
4. Let the person water one plant at a time.
5. Prompt checking the soil or leaves if appropriate.
6. Finish by wiping spills and returning the watering can.

How to grade the activity

Make it easier	Make it harder
Use a spray bottle.	Water multiple plants in sequence.
Water one or two plants only.	Check soil dryness first.
Use hand-under-hand support.	Remove dry leaves.
Choose plants at easy height.	Create a weekly plant-care routine.

Low-arousal tips	Use this as a calming task rather than a rushed chore. The rhythm of watering can be regulating when the environment is quiet and predictable.
Staff/caregiver role	Ensure safety with water, slippery surfaces and outdoor access. Encourage the person to take ownership of a specific plant or area if suitable.
Functional outcome to notice	Look for calm engagement, responsibility, sustained attention and positive participation in a shared environment.

Activity 5: Packing a personal care basket

Purpose

Supports hygiene routine preparation, body care awareness, sequencing, item recognition, choice-making and independence in ADLs.

You will need

- Small basket or toiletry bag
- Toothbrush, toothpaste and face cloth
- Deodorant, comb or brush
- Optional picture checklist
- A quiet surface for sorting

Step-by-step

1. Place the empty basket in front of the person.
2. Show the hygiene items one at a time.
3. Ask the person to choose or identify what goes into the basket.
4. Use a simple checklist if needed.
5. Pack the items in the order they may be used.
6. Link the basket to a real routine such as morning grooming or evening preparation.

How to grade the activity

Make it easier	Make it harder
Use three items only.	Pack the full routine independently.
Use picture prompts.	Ask what each item is used for.
Offer one item at a time.	Create morning and evening baskets.
Keep the basket partly packed.	Add a restocking or cleaning step.

Low-arousal tips	Hygiene tasks can feel personal or sensitive. Use respectful language, privacy and calm prompts. Avoid shaming or over-correcting.
Staff/caregiver role	Protect dignity while supporting participation. Offer choices where possible, such as comb or brush, face cloth or wipes, now or after breakfast.
Functional outcome to notice	Look for routine readiness, item recognition, tolerance of grooming preparation and increased participation in self-care.

Blank activity planning template

Use this page to plan your own functional activity using the same approach.

Section	Notes
Activity name	
Purpose / functional goal	
You will need	
Step-by-step instructions	
Make it easier	
Make it harder	
Low-arousal considerations	
Staff/caregiver role	

Activity Check In

How do I know if an activity was successful?

An activity does not need to be completed perfectly to be successful. Success may look different for each person and may change from day to day.

An activity may be considered successful if the person:

- showed interest or curiosity
- participated for any amount of time
- made a choice
- tolerated the activity without distress
- completed one step of the task
- accepted support or prompting
- communicated a preference
- appeared calm, regulated, or engaged
- returned to the activity again later
- experienced a sense of contribution, routine, or enjoyment

The goal is not perfection. The goal is **meaningful** participation.

What you noticed	What it might mean	What to try next time
The person refused the activity	They may not understand it, feel overwhelmed, or not be interested today	Offer a choice between two activities, reduce demands, or try again later
The person walked away	The activity may have been too long, too difficult, or not motivating	Shorten the activity, start with one simple step, or use a familiar item
The person became upset or agitated	The environment, task demand, noise, or prompting may have been too much	Reduce noise, use fewer words, slow down, and give more space
The person needed a lot of help	The activity may be too complex at this stage	Break it into smaller steps and support one step at a time
The person completed it very quickly	The activity may be too easy or not engaging enough	Add a choice, extra step, sorting element, or responsibility
The person made "mistakes"	They may still be learning the sequence or may need visual support	Use modelling, photos, demonstration, or hand-over-hand support where appropriate
The person only watched	Observation can still be participation	Allow watching first, then invite them to assist with one small part
The person became silly or distracted	The activity may need clearer structure or boundaries	Use a clear beginning, middle, and end; reduce distractions
The person was fixated on one item	The item may be highly preferred or sensory seeking	Use that interest as part of the activity, but set gentle limits
The activity felt too childish	The task may not feel age-appropriate	Use real-life materials and frame it as contribution, routine, or responsibility

Need further guidance?

If you would like more information or support with adapting these activities for your loved one, please feel free to contact us. Functional Adult OT can provide guidance on how to implement meaningful, adult-appropriate activities in a way that supports dignity, participation, and individual needs.

Email: admin@functionaladultot.com

Instagram: [functionaladultot](https://www.instagram.com/functionaladultot)



Functional Adult Occupational Therapy

Practical activity resources for adult-focused, dignified and functional occupational therapy support.

- Real-life skills
- Structured routines
- Low-arousal support
- Meaningful participation
- Respect, choice and dignity