

# What it Means to Be an Easterseals Occupational Therapist

“I don’t know if I chose my career or my career chose me,” says Elise Favreau, who has been a pediatric occupational therapist with Easterseals Early Supports & Services for 16 years. She works full-time with children up to age three and their families on everything from positioning and feeding to motor skills and speech. Her job is one she loves, challenges and all.

On a typical Monday, Elise will have four appointments lined up. She’ll know ahead of time which children and families she’ll be seeing so she can review notes and maximize their time together. But those appointments may take place in a home setting, a childcare, an Easterseals Early Supports & Services clinic, or, as often happens, a combination of the three, with drive times and paperwork in between. She’ll juggle seeing an infant at one appointment and a fast-moving, energetic toddler the next. “My schedule may be predictable but the services I provide are very dynamic,” she says. “I have to think on my toes and change gears quickly.”

Elise wouldn’t have it any other way. Delivering therapy to children in their natural settings and supporting them through their most formative years is a highlight of her career. It also plays a critical role in outcomes. Elise teaches parents and caregivers to use what’s readily available – toys for grabbing or a coffee table for cruising – to help children continue



*Elise (left), Easterseals pediatric occupational therapist, works with one of her young patients.*

to make progress between visits. With her coaching, parents gain confidence in their abilities to support their child. “I’m putting parents in the driver’s seat,” she says.

Children are referred to Easterseals Early Supports & Services by concerned parents and pediatricians. Sometimes infants come straight from a hospital’s neonatal care unit because they were born premature or have neonatal

abstinence syndrome (suffering withdrawal effects from a mother's addiction). During a 60-minute therapy session, Elise will work with a child on predetermined goals prioritized based on family needs. "I'll ask lots of questions," she says. "What's feasible? What works for you? Where do you need my help the most?" Sometimes it's finding a way for a fussy infant to safely do tummy time.

Elise says she needs to understand all aspects of child development to do her job well. She'll often consult with an interdisciplinary team of Easterseals colleagues that includes speech and physical therapists. "We work with the

whole child," she says. "That's what makes early intervention at Easterseals so unique." She

knows of few places in New Hampshire that provide the collaborative and home-based integrated clinical care that Easterseals does.

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*—Elise Favreau*

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Elise became a pediatric occupational therapist because she has always enjoyed working with children and families. When asked what qualities make someone a good fit for her role, Elise cites curiosity, patience, and empathy. "Being curious and really wanting to help are at the root of what I do. I'm here to help you to the best of your ability."