Dating as an Occupation: Swipe Right for OT

Karen McCarthy

*University College Cork, Ireland, karen.mccarthy@dominican.edu*

---

**Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.**

**Recommended Citation**

McCarthy, Karen, "Dating as an Occupation: Swipe Right for OT" (2016). *Collected Faculty and Staff Scholarship*. 248.

https://scholar.dominican.edu/all-faculty/248
OT Process

How to address dating in OT practice:

Referral:
- Highlight dating as an area on the referral form to OT.
- Communicate the role and scope of an OT to referral partners and multidisciplinary team so that the most appropriate referral can be made.

Evaluation:
- Include questions about dating and sexuality in the initial interview or assessment of daily activities.
- If dating is an important issue to the client, the OT could follow up with more questions to gain a more extensive occupational history (e.g. dating history, current social/leisure occupations, values, environments where the client engages in dating occupations, communication/social skills, personal dating goals)

Goal setting:
- Goals surrounding dating must be collaboratively set, client centered, and occupation based.
- Set both short term and long term goals with the client using a COAST and/or SMART format.
- Tools such as the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) or Goal Attainment Scale (GAS) might be helpful to set goals with the client.
- Focus goals on client action and activities not on an outcome that might be outside of their control, such as where the focus is on getting a date or relationship (e.g. Instead of: Client will go on one date a month, independently, to improve engagement in dating occupations, try to focus on what the client will actually do to achieve this goal. Try: Client will participate in one new social activity this month, starting conversations with group members, with minimal assistance from OT on communication skills training, to improve social engagement.

Intervention:
- The intervention with the client will be dependent on the client's goal and aims of the sessions.
- Possible interventions might include:
  - Signing up for online dating and creating a profile
  - Practicing initiating conversations (role play or practicing talking with new people in a social place)
  - Researching social activities in the community and completing a timetable with social events
  - Addressing self-care and dressing
  - Working on self-esteem and confidence building activities
- The interventions should be client led and use the expertise of the client in the sessions.
- Whenever possible, it is helpful to engage the client in occupations in social environments or where dating might occur (e.g. meeting in a coffee shop or going to a community dance).

Outcome:
- The focus should be on occupational engagement and/or improving underlying skills (e.g. social skills).
- Using tools such as the COPM and GAS to re-assess the client's goals can be helpful to have standardised outcomes.

Implications for OT Practice

Dating is an occupation that when identified as important to a client, cannot be ignored in OT practice. OTs in traditional areas can address issues related to dating and sexuality as part of their existing practice. OTs may also choose to specialise in the occupation of dating, as dating coaches.

Dating coaching is a possible role emerging area of practice for OTs and an opportunity to extend practice into a wellness and preventative approach. When someone is struggling with dating and wanting help— they might just "swipe right" (say yes) to OT.

References