

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



Using proprioceptive input

Most of us are aware of our 5 primary senses, sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. In fact, we have more than five senses. The proprioceptive sense tells out body about our joint positioning and muscle tension. Even while we are completely still gravity activates our proprioceptive receptors to inform us of our body position without needing to look.

Proprioception tells us:

- Where our body or body parts are in space
- How our body parts relate to one another
- How much and how quickly our muscles are stretching
- How fast our body is moving through space
- If we are moving in rhythm, and
- How much force our muscles put forth



Proprioception is the most powerful form of sensory input. It can reduce over-responsivity in other systems, helping us to find the just right level of alertness and decrease anxiety. Children who need more proprioceptive input may have difficulty sitting still and enjoy rough play, or may appear extremely sluggish and need waking up.

Children who experience difficulties with proprioceptive may find the following strategies helpful:

- ☺ 'Jump and wiggle' breaks are a great way to help children re-focus as they appear to be becoming disruptive or dysregulated. Lots of teachers use 'the bean game' within their classrooms as a short jump and wiggle break.
- ☺ Sensory related behaviours are very difficult for a child to control and for this reason breaks should be used to prevent behavior escalating or to calm a child that is having a meltdown. They should not be removed if a child is behaving poorly or used only as a reward for good behaviour.
- ☺ Some children may need movement breaks as often as every 45 minutes or as little as every 2-3 hours. Every child is different.
- ☺ A general rule of thumb is that 15-20 minutes of intense proprioception can create up to 2 hours of calm and organised behaviour. An occupational therapist can help design a 'sensory diet' that schedules proprioceptive activity breaks throughout the day.
- ☺ Some children may become over-excitabile as a result of proprioception. It is important to trial activities to see how they influence the regulation of each child. An occupational therapist can give you information about using the Alert Program 'How Does Your Engine Run?' to teach the child to see when they are 'too high', 'just right' or 'too low' during activities.

- ☺ Give children opportunities to regularly change positions while working e.g. Have them move between sitting at a table and on the floor.
- ☺ Weighted lap blankets, lap cushions or objects of approximately 10% of the child's body weight can be relaxing for the child while they are expected to be quiet and attentive.
- ☺ Regularly giving children a firm squeeze at their shoulder, elbow, wrist, knee and ankle joints can increase the child's body awareness and reduce incidences of accidental pushing and hitting. Alternatively, teach the child to give themselves a squeeze.
- ☺ Activities that are lower to the ground tend to be more calming than those that involve being upright e.g. log rolling versus running



Activity Ideas:

Proprioception can be active (involving movement) or passive (given to the child through deep pressure). Children tend to respond better to one type or the other. Below are a number of activities that will increase the amount of proprioceptive input the children are receiving.

- ☺ Having a gym ball rolled over their back and arms while lying on the floor to calm them down, slowly rolling up and back. This could be done with soothing music.
- ☺ Rolling along the floor on a scooter board while lying on their stomach to work the child's back, stomach and arm muscles. Encourage the child to use their two hands symmetrically or pull themselves along on a rope.
- ☺ Spending time hanging from monkey bars and climbing on playground equipment to give their wrists and knees more proprioception.
- ☺ Log rolling along the floor for whole body proprioception. This could be done as a game of musical chairs.
- ☺ Having a game of chasey or a race on hopping balls.
- ☺ Helping to lift and carry heavy things e.g. bringing in washing from the clothes line, returning a bag of books to the library, or carrying, pushing or pulling along a box of toys.
- ☺ Moving between activities in different animal positions e.g. rabbit, frog, snake, bear, crab or duck.
- ☺ Play dough, theraputty, pegs, squeeze bottles and sponges provide proprioceptive input to the fingers and wrist joints.
- ☺ Have a game of tug-of-war with a rope or gym ball.
- ☺ Create an obstacle course with opportunities for jumping, hopping, crawling, climbing and balancing.

