

PROPRIOCEPTIVE/HEAVY WORK ACTIVITIES

WHAT IS PROPRIOCEPTION?

Proprioception refers to the body's ability to sense movement within joints and joint position. This enables us to know where our body/limbs are in space without looking at them.

Example: close your eyes and touch your nose

WHY DO THESE EXERCISES HELP?

Providing resistance to muscles and joints is generally calming.

These activities can help improve body awareness and balance, improve attention/concentration, improve the ability to sit still, and regulate the nervous system.

ACTIVITIES

Carrying Heavy Loads

Have the child carry large (but not hot or fragile) items to the table, or filled laundry baskets from room to room, or grocery bags into the house. The child can also carry a load of books, a bucket of dirt or toys, or a watering can from one spot to another.

Pushing and Pulling

Set grocery bags down inside the front door and have the child drag them to the kitchen. Let him push the wheelbarrow or stroller, vacuum, rake, push heavy boxes, pull a friend on a sled or blanket, or pull a loaded wagon. Hard muscular work is calming and organizing.

Hanging

Mount a chinning bar in the child's doorway, or hang from the monkey bars at the park. When the child suspends his/her weight from the hands, the muscles and joints send sensory messages to the brain. Shifting weight from hand to hand as in moving along a ladder builds upper-body strength.

Pillow Fun

Pile several large cushions, beanbag chairs, or downy comforters in a corner. Invite the child to dive, jump, roll and dig into the cushions. You could also make a "crash cushion": stuff large foam scraps, towels, blankets, etc. into a comforter cover or into a huge bag made by sewing two sheets together.

Snail

Place a large bag of rice or beans on the child's back and let him/her move around with a heavy "shell" on the back.

Joint Compress

Put one hand on the child's forearm and the other hand on his upper arm. With slow, firm pressure, push the forearm and upper arm toward the elbow, then, pull them away. Push and pull the muscles near knees and shoulders. To activate proprioceptors in other ways, press both hands down on the head; slowly straighten and bend fingers, wrists, elbows, knees ankles and toes. These extension and flexion techniques provide traction and compression to joints and are calming, especially when confined to smaller spaces, like church pews, movie theaters, cars, buses, and in airplanes, where the gravity changes.

Body Squeeze

Sit on the floor behind the child, straddling him/her with your legs. Put your arms around the child's knees, draw them toward the chest, and squeeze hard. Holding tight, rock back and forth..

Bear Hugs

More effective from behind. Repeat often.

Pouring

Put different amounts of sand, rice, or water into a cup or bowl. Let the child pour from one container to another.

Opening Doors

Make it a practice to encourage the child to open doors. Provide some assistance with heavy doors.

Ripping

Give your child old newspaper and let him/her tear strips and rip them up to make a pile of confetti.

Back-to-Back Standing Up

Position two children on the floor, back to back. Ask them to "dig their feet into the floor" and to stand up together by pressing against each other's back.

Tug-of-War

Get a long, thick rope or sheet and tie knots in it to make it easier to grip. Try this game as you sit, stand, or kneel

"Bulldozer"

One child sits in a large cardboard box or on a blanket, and another child pushes the load across the floor, using his head, shoulders, back, or feet to make it move.

Playing Catch

Toss a big ball or pillow back and forth.

Roughhousing

Pushing, pulling, rolling, and tumbling with an adult or friend can feel good all over, but this activity must be carefully supervised so no one gets hurt or overloaded with sensory stimulation. Two important reminders: Never pull on each other's clothes, and never tickle.

Arm wrestling

Make the child work for victory.

Rolling Pin Fun

Provide the child with a cylindrical piece of wood or a rolling pin without handles, so he/she presses down with his opened hands. Have the child roll real dough, playdough, crackers, clay or mud!

