

HEAVY WORK ACTIVITIES

Proprioception is a form of sensory input to the muscles and joints which makes us aware of our "position in space" (i.e., where we are in relation to other objects or people). Proprioceptive input is the performance of tasks that involves heavy resistance, and is essential in helping our bodies assimilate and process both movement (vestibular) and touch (tactile) information. Heavy work activities (i.e., proprioceptive input) are used for children with sensory processing difficulties to help increase attention, decrease defensiveness and modulate arousal.

Children who have difficulty interpreting proprioceptive input have trouble grading and planning their movements and regulating their level of arousal. You may see a child who accidentally breaks things often, appears clumsy and uncoordinated and may have an excessive need to crash and bump into objects, walls and people. If they are seeking out excessive proprioceptive input, they are looking for a way to calm and organize their nervous system. They may seem disruptive, full of excessive energy, or even unsafe. These are the crashers, jumpers, movers, and shakers! There are also children on the opposite end of this spectrum – children who appear shy and timid, or “shut down”. These are both the children we ABSOLUTELY want to target with heavy work activities. It WILL make a difference in them!

The following is a list of heavy work activities/proprioceptive activities that may help regulate a child's arousal level, concentration, ability to fall asleep or sit still and attend to a task. Keep in mind, the type of heavy work activities, timing and duration is most effective when directed by a professional (such as an Occupational or Physical Therapist) knowledgeable about this type of proprioceptive input. It is also important to note which activities calm your child, arouse them, or over arouse them. This is very unique to each individual and must be observed and treated as such! You also want to choose activities THEY are interested in and that IMPROVE their state of arousal to its most functional point.

- Carrying objects, such as...groceries , animal backpacks, kids fanny pack, stacking or moving chairs/books, watering can/hose, baby's diaper bag, or ANYTHING with weight to it.
- Pushing or pulling objects and activities, such as... toy shopping cart, laundry basket, kids wagon, raise/lower flag at school, tug of war rope, rainbow putty press (flatten putty on wall or desk/table), toy vacuum, mop/sweep floor with a mop, wrestling, shoveling snow with a kids snow shovel, raking leaves, dirt etc., using a kid's wheelbarrow and garden tools, pushing/pulling self or others on a jumbo scooter board, exercise bands, "push of war" between partners (with ball, have to cross over line)
- Jumping and bouncing on/with items, such as...on a trampoline, on an old mattress or soft area, into bean bag chairs, on a therapy ball (with adult assistance of course), on a pogo stick, moon shoes, on a hopping ball, horseback riding, with a jump rope, foam hopscotch pads, ankle twister jump ropes, floor gymnastics, on jumpolones or backyard bouncers
- Climbing/hanging on things, such as...on jungle gyms/Geo-Dome, monkey bars, jungle climber with swings, hanging rings and trapeze, zipline, rock walls, outside on rocks or trees, up ladder and/or slide, climbing rope, climbing cargo nets