

Heavy Work / Proprioceptive Activities for School



What is Heavy Work or Proprioception?

Proprioception is part of our sensory system and is the sense of self movement and body position. It refers to compression (e.g. weight-bearing or pushing) and traction which stimulates nerves in the joints where muscles attach. This tells us where our body is in space, and where the limbs are in relation to our body. This allows us to perform tasks with coordination.

Why are Heavy Work / Proprioceptive Activities Important?

The sensory input provided during heavy work activities often helps increase a child's level of alertness but can also have a calming, organising effect on the nervous system. Heavy work activities contribute to a child's body awareness, motor planning ability and the development of stability for coordination.

To stimulate proprioceptive sensors, do "heavy work" tasks. A benefit of doing heavy tasks is that you are using groups of larger muscles, which helps prepare (organise) your brain to focus more readily on functional tasks such as writing, reading and drawing.

How Often Should these Activities be Implemented?

The idea is to do these regularly and frequently in order to give the child the sensory input the body may need to regulate. These same strategies may be used during times to help calm the child if the child is frustrated or over- aroused.

Try doing a heavy work activity as a break between work times, before engaging in a quiet/fine motor/cognitive tasks, or anytime to promote coordination and sense of calm and organisation.

What Activities can I Implement in or around the Classroom and School?

- Place chairs on desks at end of day or take down at beginning of day.
- Help rearrange desks in the classroom.
- Chair push-ups (seated in the chair, try to push your body up for 10 counts; this works best with a chair with arms).
- Help the janitor with emptying wastebaskets, vacuum or mop the floor, etc.
- Cut out items for display with heavy weight paper like tag board.
- Carry heavy notebooks to the office or from class to class

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- Wear a weighted vest or backpack with a heavy book inside walking to and back from school.
- Carry books/files with both hands hugging the book to yourself.
- Have the child pass out papers/objects to the class members.
- Staple paper onto bulletin boards.
- Open or hold doors for people.
- Help the P.E. teacher move mats and equipment.
- Climbing activities (such as playground equipment or an adventure course using the PE apparatus).
- Swimming –including climbing out and jumping in and retrieving objects from the pool floor (safety first).
- Put obstacles to climb over, crawl through, balance on etc. along the daily mile.
- Push against a wall (do "push-ups" for count of 10 against a wall).
- Balloon tennis using beach bats and anti-burst balloons.
- Sports activities involving running and jumping.
- Animal walks (crab walk, bear walk, snake, caterpillar or leopard crawl)
- Jump patterns such as Jumping jacks, star jumps, ski- jumps and even Hopscotch.
- Sitting and bouncing on a therapy ball counting down from 100.
- Slowly roll ball over child a few times like steamroller with sight pressure as she lays on her back or tummy
- Mini trampoline, jumping 30 times before “crashing” into a large heap of cushions or dense gym mat.
- Push another child on a swing.
- Playing tug of war with a big exercise rubber band or rope.
- Gardening: for example, keep a herb garden, where the child has to use a watering can, weed and aerate wet heavy soil.
- Paint large murals against a wall or have the child colour a rainbow with large paper on the floor in four-point kneeling position or with chunky chalk on the pavement.

Positioning:

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- Teachers have successfully used beanbag chairs in their classroom, allowing children to use them during silent reading time or to lay over or under during independent work tasks. Although this is a more passive mechanism, the constant deep pressure is helpful for many students.
- At times, allow the child to stand and work at the desk.

Fine Motor Activities:

- Sharpen pencils with a manual sharpener.
- Quiet squeeze toys such as a squishy cow or stress ball. Children can be taught to squeeze the object on their laps under their desks so as not to disturb the class.
- Prior to seated work, have child pinch, roll, pull thera-putty or squeeze balloons filled with flour.
- Heavy work activities for the hands and fingers can be done for 1 – 3 minutes prior to fine motor academic tasks:
 - pinches or hole punching
 - spider push-ups
 - rubber band stretches
 - fidget balls
 - playing with thera-putty

N.B. Please contact the Children's Occupational Therapy Team should the child develop adverse responses to the above suggested activities.

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