

80+ Powerful  
**PROPRIOCEPTIVE  
ACTIVITIES**

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### **What is Proprioception?**

We need to clear this up because most people have never been taught about this 7th sense. Heck, spell check doesn't even recognize it as a word! Understanding how it works is an important key to understanding why it helps your child or even why they seek it.

In the simplest terms, proprioception is our body's ability to know where it is at any given time (otherwise called body awareness). And just like we see through receptors called our eyes, with proprioception, we know where our body is because of receptors that run all through our muscles and joints. Our vision is stimulated by bright lights or moving objects, and proprioception is stimulated by pressure to the receptors all throughout our body. Anytime we squeeze through a tight space, hug someone, or jump up and down we are getting proprioceptive input.

### **Why Does Proprioception Matter?**

Our proprioceptive system helps us walk across the room without bumping into anything or climb a jungle gym or hold a pencil to write. We have to know where each part of our body is and how to get it there quickly to be able to do just about anything. Proprioception plays a HUGE role in that and developing it is obviously important for all kids.

### **How Do You Know When a Child Needs Proprioceptive Activities?**

Proprioception is a big deal with kids that have sensory needs because it's the only sense that calms and helps improve focus almost across the board, when used the right way. The vast majority of kids like proprioceptive input, and many seek it out. And, even if your child doesn't have specific "sensory needs", proprioceptive activities can still be beneficial to help them calm down when they get upset or to relax before bedtime.

Your child may especially benefit from proprioceptive activities if they fall into one of two categories:

Proprioceptive Seekers:

The first is seeking and is also the most common. Seeking means that your child is often trying to get more proprioceptive input. It's like their bodies can't get enough of it. Sometimes kids that love this type of input may be labeled as hyperactive. And, they are sort of hyperactive as their trying to get their sensory needs met. Learn more about how to handle hyperactivity in kids.

Let's get specific though, **kids that are proprioceptive seekers may frequently:**

Chew on everything

Hide in tight spots

Love heavy blankets

Play rough

Crash into things on purpose

Always try to jump on the couch or bed

Be described as very physical or “wild”

Over-step personal boundaries

Hold onto writing utensils tightly

Proprioceptive Low Registration Signs:

The second is called low registration, which is less common, but quite possible. Low registration, or under-responsive, means that the sensory input, in this case from the proprioceptive system, isn't registering. It's like the brain has turned the switch off. Let's look at some signs of low proprioceptive registration:

Clumsy

Generally low energy

May not want to get out of bed in the morning

Bumps into walls and objects, seeming not to notice them

Very high pain tolerance

*If your child has several signs listed above, under either category, then activities that target proprioceptive input will be meeting their needs and encouraging their development completely.*

### **Powerful Proprioceptive Activities for Kids**

Proprioceptive activities can be thought about and organized into different categories, some of which your child may respond to and some they may not. And, when I say “respond to”, I want you to think back to the little boy in Sunday school. His smile, eye contact, and then ability to follow directions were clear indicators that he was “responding to” the proprioceptive input. For your child it may be that they were able to focus to finish their homework or sit through dinner easily.

Keep in mind that while most kids seek or at least enjoy proprioceptive activities in general, there may be some in particular that they do not like. You never have to force any sensory activity or input. Many of these activities give input to multiple senses, like hugging or climbing. Hugging also gives input to the tactile system and climbing also involves a lot of vestibular input. If your child doesn't like or want either of those other types of sensory input, then they probably won't want to participate in that activity. And, that's okay!

First, I want to show you the most basic, and probably the simplest proprioceptive activities. These activities can be used to alert, calm down, and improve focus and attention in your child, but it's also

possible that they can make a child wild, as well. Sometimes jumping on the bed can get really silly and out of control. This will do anything but calm, and that probably isn't what you're going for.

If you're looking to calm or to improve attention, then may want to structure the activities a little bit, although this isn't always necessary. I would try these strategies if you notice that any of the proprioceptive activities are winding up instead of winding down:

Sing a rhythmic song like, "The Ants Go Marching One by One..." or some other song with a steady beat while your child jumps or stomps. Jumping in particular can really stimulate some kids.

Give the activity purpose. Instead of saying, "Go run around the house", say, "Can you run to the swing set and back?"

Now that we've got that cleared up, let's look at these

### **Powerful proprioceptive activities:**

Jumping on, Trampoline, Bed, Floor, Couch

Running

Climbing jungle gym, stairs, tree, rock wall, backwards up a slide

Hanging on monkey bars, tree, pull up bar, rope swing, from the side of a bed

Stomping

Bouncing on top of a large ball (We use this yoga ball, it's lasted us 10 years!)

Wheelbarrow walking



Crab walking

Using a pogo stick (This one is perfect because it's safe for toddlers and kids)

Pushing a scooter board (especially with hands while riding on belly)

Kicking balls

Stretch band tied around the legs of a chair (awesome for kids in school)

Crawling Through a tunnel

Obstacle course

Chewing Gum

Chewy necklaces, bracelets and toys

Crunchy foods (raw veggies, pretzels, etc.)

Chewy foods (dried fruits, gummy candy, etc.)

Drinking through a straw

Milkshake (thicker drinks give even more input)

Squeezing Stress ball, Play dough, Putty

Stretching and pulling on stretchy band (like a yoga or Pilates strap)

Chair push ups

Jumping jacks

Push ups

Rolling on belly over a large yoga ball and using arms to hold up

Playing in a body sock

Yoga poses (here are some that target proprioceptive input)

### **Heavy Work Activities**

Heavy work activities mean exactly what the name implies, these activities require our kids to actively use their muscles to push, pull, lift, or carry objects that are heavy. When we use our muscles in this way, it creates resistance and pressure is inadvertently put on those proprioceptive receptors in the muscles and joints.

Here are some ideas to inspire you:

Push/pull heavy objects

laundry basket

Wheelbarrow

Lawn mower

Grocery cart (could be a play version for young children)

Vacuum

Furniture

Carry heavy objects, Bags or items from grocery store/pantry, Book bag, loaded boxes, Medicine ball, garbage bins/cans to or from the curb

Dig with Rake, Shovel in snow, sand, leaves



Pull on a rope (a jump rope can work just fine):

tie it to a door knob

tie to a tree

tie to a swing set

tug of war

Load/unload the dishwasher

### Deep Pressure Activities

Deep pressure activities are often passive and provide lots of calming sensations. They are often used when a child has difficulty sitting still or transitioning to different activities. But, these types of activities aren't received well by all kids. Deep pressure also provides a lot of tactile input, and if your child is sensitive to that, deep pressure may not be a good strategy for them. They'll let you know!

If you aren't sure that your child will like these activities, you can experiment by just putting a lot of blankets on them or try placing a heavy object on their lap. If they seem to like it, you may want to invest in (or make) some of the weighted item below. I've shared affiliate links to some of my favorite versions below:



Getting or giving hugs

Rolling up tightly in blanket like a burrito

Sitting with a weighted lap pad or toy (Learn how and when to use a weighted lap pad with your child).

Wearing a weighted or pressure vest (You'll want to make sure you get the right size and if using weighted, the correct amount of weight. I like using this store to order one because they have trained customer service that will help you get what's right for your child.)

Squeezing into tight spots

Lying under heavy objects, couch cushions, pillows, weighted blanket (these are an investment, but for kids that respond well to them they can be worth every penny.)

Getting or giving a massage

Joint compressions



Use a large ball to “steam roll” over a child’s body (press firmly, be careful with head)

Sit or stand on a wobble seat or wobble cushion (great for when kids need to sit still)

\*Note that weighted vests, lap pads and toys will only be beneficial for about 20 minutes, after that the body gets used to the weight. It is fine to use a weighted blanket throughout the night though.

### **Must Read Tips before Starting Proprioceptive Activities**

1. Any of the activities in the above list can be used as often or as little as your child seems to need them. If you aren't sure when your child “needs” these activities, I'd highly recommend reading about what sensory diets are. Even though they don't sound too pleasant, who likes a diet, they can be quite simple and even life changing. I also have a sensory diet template you can follow that gives you the ins and outs of when to choose what activities. There's even a free printable template you can snag too!

2. These proprioceptive activities will work for kids of all ages, but you may need to adjust them to fit your child's development. For instance, an 8 year old can push the cart while you're in the grocery store, but your 2 year old could use a play cart at home with a couple of heavy cans in it.

3. About half of the activities above are actively controlled by your child. Meaning, they decide how long and hard to run, how many times to jump on the bed, or how many boxes they can pick up. This is ideal because they are determining what is the best level of input for their needs, and they know that better than anyone. However, some of these activities give passive proprioceptive input, like giving joint compressions, a hug, or a massage. That can also be a good thing, and may be necessary, but you have to watch for cues that your child isn't uncomfortable or disliking the input you're offering.