

## HEAVY WORK ACTIVITIES

All students can benefit from movement activities in the classroom that provide input to the proprioceptive receptors in the joints and ligaments. In addition to providing exercise, these types of “heavy work” movements make it easier for the student to focus and attend.

Heavy work activities (i.e. proprioceptive input) are used for students with sensory processing difficulties to help increase attention, decrease defensiveness, and modulate arousal.

Proprioceptive input is the performance of tasks that involves heavy resistance and input to the muscles and joints, and is essential in helping our bodies assimilate and process both movement (vestibular) and touch (tactile) information.

Proprioception is a form of sensory input to the muscles and joints that makes us aware of our “position in space” (i.e., where we are in relation to other objects or people). Students who have difficulty interpreting proprioceptive input have trouble grading and planning their movements and regulating their level of arousal.

Heavy work activities include:

1. Whole body actions involving pushing, pulling, lifting, playing and moving
2. Oral actions such as chewing, sucking and blowing
3. Using the hands for squeezing, pinching or “fidgeting”



This resistive input obtained through heavy work activities is generally organizing and can improve attention, arousal level, body awareness and muscle tone, as well as decreasing defensiveness.

The following is a list of heavy work activities/proprioceptive activities that may help regulate a student'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 Therapist) knowledgeable about this type of proprioceptive input.

It is also important to note which activities calm your student, arouse them or over arouse them. This is very unique to each individual and must be observed and treated as such!

Naturally occurring activities within the school environment:

### **Seated activities**

- Wring a thick piece of rope
- Use elastic bands on the fingers and doing "finger exercises"
- Sit on hands
- Use a disc 'n sit
- Use quiet squeeze toys that won't distract others
- Chair push-ups
- Prior to seatwork, have student pinch, roll, pull theraputty or squeeze balloons filled with flour. Give student firm pressure on shoulders
- Take chewy candy breaks – such as licorice, fruit roll-ups, Starburst or Tootsie Rolls or crunchy foods such as dry cereal, vegetables, pretzels or popcorn
- Sip from a water bottle with a straw
- Use a beanbag chair in the classroom during silent reading or independent work tasks.

### **Whole body activities**

- Place chairs on desks at the end of the day or take down at the beginning of the day.
- Wash desks and/or chalkboard/dry erase board
- Help rearrange desks in the classroom
- Help the janitor with emptying wastebaskets, mopping the floor, etc.
- Help the gym teacher move mats, hang them up, set-up or take down equipment
- Sharpen pencils with a manual sharpener
- Carry heavy notebooks to the office or from class to class
- Push the lunch cart or carry lunch bin to the cafeteria
- Staple paper onto bulletin boards
- Run around the track at school

- Wear a weighted backpack when walking from class to class. Be cautious about how much weight goes in the backpack so that it does not result in lower back pain
- Carry books with both hands hugging the books to the chest
- Have student move several packs at a time of photocopy paper from storage area to the school copy center
- Perform sports activities that involve running and jumping
- Have students push against a wall
- Stack chairs
- Animal walks (crab walk, bear walk, army crawl)