



What is Proprioception?

You may have heard this term used by the OT or PT who is working with your child but are not sure what it means...

Proprioception or *body awareness* refers to one of our senses – it is a “hidden” sense because it happens at an automatic level. We don't learn about this sense the same way that we learn about our other senses - sight, sound, taste, touch and smell.

We receive sensory information through our muscles, tendons and joints that tells our brain exactly where our body parts are. This helps us in planning our next movements and in making continual adjustments in order to adapt to the activity that we are engaged in.

We rely on this sense for many different types of activities including:

- to help us stay in the best position while sitting in a chair (and not fall out of our seat!)
- to maneuver through space without bumping into things
- to hold a pencil the right way and with the correct amount of pressure so that it doesn't break.
- to adjust our movements so that we are more successful the next time we do it (e.g. throwing a ball or kicking at a target and missing)

Problems with this sense can cause a lot of trouble. Instead of doing activities automatically, a child needs to pay more attention and rely more on vision to help him out. A child may be clumsy, frustrated and even be afraid in some situations. Walking down stairs, climbing a slide or learning to ride a bicycle are examples of activities that can scare if you don't know where your feet are or can't make accurate and automatic adjustments to your movements.

Our proprioception sense can be activated through a variety of different types of activities: pushing/pulling, lifting/carrying, jumping, deep pressure or firm touch and activities that involve weight/resistance.

Activities to Increase Body Awareness

1. *Have children help with "heavy work" activities like carrying the groceries, carrying the laundry basket, pulling weeds and digging in the garden.*
2. *Make a "sandwich" out of your child between the couch cushions. Gently add pressure as you pretend to put on the pickles, cheese, lettuce etc. You may also try to roll a ball on him to "spread the mustard".*
3. *Play Simon Says with your eyes closed - your child must move into different positions without looking, such as roll into a ball, touch his nose, knees or move body parts into various positions.*
4. *Play "backpacking" and place bags of beans or rice in a child-size backpack. Pretend to be climbing mountains or jumping off rocks at the park or in the backyard.*
5. *Move your child through an action and provide gentle resistance to his movements so that he can feel it more easily. You may also try small wrist and ankle weights.*

