

SELF REGULATION AND SENSORY PROCESSING

Our brains constantly process and organise huge amounts of sensory information on a daily basis. Children who have experienced trauma, neglect or abuse in their pre – natal or early years may find it hard to process and organise all the sensory information the brain receives. They may also be extra sensitive to some of these sensory experiences. At times this can lead to them feeling anxious and struggle to regulate their emotions.

Using sensory regulating activities on a daily basis can be helpful in helping children remain calm, focussed and regulated during the day and enable them to manage their day to day routine and transitions more effectively.

Proprioception

This is often referred to as heavy/hard work. Proprioception receptors are located in joints, muscles and tendons all over the body. They are activated by compression, traction and elongation.

Proprioception can be a tool for calming, organising and self regulating the brain and nervous system. 15 minutes of proprioception activities can have a 1-2 hour positive effect.

Activities

Deep pressure touch- hand hugs/squeezes, or pressure on legs, arms, feet, back
Heavy/hard work- muscle engagement
Ankles- toe walking

Ideas for Incorporating Proprioception into the day

- Wheelbarrow walking
- Carry heavy items (laundry basket, bags of shopping etc)
- Chewy food
- Drinking smoothies, thick milkshakes through a straw
- Push/pull heavy items (shopping trolley)
- Digging in sand/soil
- Cushion games- jump on them, cushion sandwich
- Cycling
- Rake leaves, shovel snow
- Push a wheel barrow
- Carry buckets of water
- Deep pressure hugs/bear hugs
- Heavy quilts / blankets as bedding
- Swimming
- Gymnastics

- Compression clothing ie leotards, leggings, athletic clothing
- Wash the car, hovering
- Make a tent/pillow cave
- Hang from a trapeze type bar
- Headstands against the wall
- Large gym ball activities- roll on it walk on hands, lie over backwards and rock back and forth
- Roll up tightly in a blanket- be a sausage roll
- Crab walking, bear walking, frog leaping
- Trampoline
- Marching, stomping, skipping, running hopping
- Crawl through a fabric tunnel

Joint traction

This relates to tension or pulling on the joint. Develops self body awareness, special body awareness, self regulation. It can be calming, organising and regulating for the brain.

- Climb/hang for a tree or monkey type bar
- Hang from bar by knees
- Drape backwards over a therapy/large ball/space hopper with arms over head
- Hang over side of bed
- Stretching activities/yoga
- Pulling heavy items
- Carry heavy objects

Joint compression

- Jumping, running, hopping, skipping
- Wheelbarrow walking
- Yoga poses
- Trampoline
- Hand stands/cartwheels
- Bike riding
- Pushing heavy things- boxes, shopping trolley, Hoover
- Crab walking

CO- REGULATION

Its vital to remember that children will not be able to regulate by themselves. It's the role of the adult to act as the co regulator. The co- regulator needs to be calm and stable.

Deep breathing, blowing and sucking activities are helpful in promoting a calm and stable emotional state.

It maybe helpful to include some of the activities above as part of a child's daily routine as this may enable them to manage their daily routine and remain more regulated throughout the day.

If you anticipate times when your child may struggle, ie a time daily transition and their anxieties maybe heightened, it maybe helpful to plan in a sensory regulating activity prior to the transition as they may cope with the transition more positively.

Not all of the activities listed may work for your child, or they may work one day and not the next, as how children experience any change and challenge will vary on a day to day and situational basis.

For further ideas and information:

'Your Essential Guide to Understanding Sensory Processing Disorder' by Angie Voss

This practical and easy to read guide was created to give the reader a more in-depth look at sensory processing disorder and sensory integration, yet not so much that it is overwhelming.

'The Scared Gang' by Éadaoin Bhreathnach

The Scared Gang Series helps children to recognise their own survival patterns through the Scared Gang characters. Each character represents a different pattern and tells children how they can self regulate through the use of food and sensory-based activities.