We’re probably all familiar with the five senses that help us experience our world: sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. People with expertise in how our senses work and what happens when they’re out-of-sync often include two more senses: proprioceptive and vestibular. These can be explained like this:

- **Proprioceptive**: Refers to our awareness of body movement (where a certain body part is and how it is moving). It helps us do things like automatically remember how to go up and down steps.

- **Vestibular**: Refers to our sense of balance and how our bodies move in space. It helps prevent dizziness.

As many as 1 in 20 children have difficulties processing the information received through their senses. How do you know if a child has a problem with their proprioceptive or vestibular sense, and what can you do to help?

**Symptoms of sensory problems**

- **Proprioception**: bumps into people, furniture or walls; accidentally spills when pouring or drinking; has poor body awareness and can't figure out what to do to make his/her body complete a task

- **Vestibular sense**: seems clumsy and moves awkwardly; is excessively cautious on stairs; has trouble tracking a moving object; fidgets constantly; gets dizzy easily or never seems to get dizzy; avoids changes in head position; avoids or craves moving playground equipment

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Potential activities and equipment for children with body movement and balance problems

- **Vestibular system**: (depending on whether the sense is over- or under-active): tumbling; slow repetitive rhythmic movements such as swaying in a rocking chair; firm pressure on the body from hugs; outdoor and indoor swings; rocking toys, balancing boards, spinning toys

- **Proprioceptive system**: stress balls and modeling clay; weighted vests or hats; “heavy work” activities such as whole body actions (pushing, pulling, lifting); oral actions like chewing and blowing; using hands for squeezing or pinching (objects, not other children!)

**Two important reminders**

1. Make sure physical activity is part of the routine every day. These children need it!

2. Don’t hesitate to get advice from a qualified occupational therapist about effective proven strategies and treatments.

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**RESOURCES**


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Programs and families can contact the program leadership directly at PAIECMH@pakeys.org with questions or concerns.

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