

Sensory Issues: Body Movement and Balance

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.

R E S O U R C E S

Sensory Processing Issues Explained. Child Mind Institute. <http://bit.ly/2lndfIT>

Kids Who Feel Too Much. Parents. <http://bit.ly/2mnNtvj>

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

