



up their Sensory Diet

All children need an environment rich with opportunities to feed their need for optimal development. When we were kids we climbed rocks and trees, played hopscotch, jumped rope, went down the slide head first on our bellies, twisted the swing tight and let it slowly unwind, spinning us round and round. We enjoyed the large, metal carousel in the park and swung on the monkey bars until we had blisters. We hung upside down on the jungle gym letting all of the blood rush to our head. We rolled down hills and did somersaults until we were dizzy. Wrestling sibling and friends in the grass along with piggy back rides and wheel barrow walking were great impromptu activities.

Today's children NEED these type of activities. While many of the above activities we enjoyed as children are no longer considered "safe" or are not appropriate in group settings- there are countless, safe ways to provide this type of sensory input to children in today's' world.

First let's explore what they NEED?

Vestibular movement can rev you up or calm you down. Sensory processing of the vestibular sense involves sensory receptors of the inner ear telling us how our body is moving in relationship to space and gravity. It is the sense that allows us to coordinate movements of the eyes, head, and body. Vestibular movements are fantastic for improving speech and language skills.

Proprioception refers to input to the muscles, joints, ligaments, tendons and connective tissue. It refers to motor control and planning, body awareness, grading of movement (knowing how "hard" or "soft" to perform a task), and postural stability. Proprioceptive input keeps kids' bodies calm, organized, and arousal levels regulated. **Heavy work and Deep Pressure Activities** gives children proprioceptive input to help children regulate their arousal levels. The premise behind these activities is to help their bodies receive regular input into their muscles and joints in the most appropriate ways so they can get the input they crave and settle their bodies down. This means children who get plenty of heavy work opportunities can better focus on fine motor activities when the need arises.

Bilateral Coordination

This refers to coordinating movements on both sides of the body at the same time. This can mean using the two sides for the same action (like using a rolling pin) or using alternating movements (like climbing stairs). **Crossing the midline**, which relies on good bilateral coordination, means using part of one side of the body in the space of the other part. Crossing midline is a very necessary skill that is needed for both reading and writing.

Activities that offer Proprioceptive Input:

Carrying:

- A water can or hose
- A back pack
- Anything with weight in it

Pulling & Pushing:

- A wagon
- A play shopping cart with something heavy in it
- A laundry basket with heavy items
- Tug of War- younger children should be seating for this so they don't have far to tumble
- Pushing a toy vacuum
- Mopping or sweeping- even if the floor is no cleaner
- Shoveling and raking
- Riding bikes

Jumping & Bouncing:

- Have a "crash pad" with padding on the floor and wall that kids crash into
- Jumping, galloping, skipping, hopping

Other:

- Wheelbarrow walking
- Sack races
- Lizard crawl (belly on floor, push with elbows)
- Crawling in tunnels
- Crab walking
- Wrapping child firmly in a blanket- like a burrito
- Have children lay on bellies in a circle- roll a large exercise ball over their backs
- Roll a bolster over their back as they lay on their bellies and pretend to be gingerbread cookies
- Stacking pillows or heavy blankets or a beanbag chair on the child (head free, of course)



Activities that offer Vestibular input:

- Whirling around and around
- Headstands
- Forward rolls (somersaults)
- Cartwheels
- One-point swings
- Log rolls (rolling over, and over- keep arms above heads)
- Dangling with head over the edge of a couch
- Rocking horses or boats
- Sit n Spin
- Ring Around the Rosies
- Sliding down the slide



Activities that offer Bilateral Coordination opportunities:

- Jumping jacks
- Skipping
- Twister
- Simon Says
- Kicking a ball
- Riding a trike