

## **Sensory Strategies for Home:**

### **Movement and Heavy Work to Organize and Calm the Nervous System**

#### **Heavy Work & Deep Pressure:**

These activities provide intense input to the muscles and joints through the use of resistive exercises and weighted equipment that offers increased proprioceptive input. The proprioceptive sensory system transmits vital information to the brain from receptors in all of the muscles and joints of the body and provides feedback to the brain about the position of the body in space and the direction and velocity of one's movements. These sensory impulses are created when muscles contract and/or stretch and by pulling and compression of the joints. Proprioceptive input can calm or alert the nervous system to assist in self-regulation of one's activity level and allow individuals to achieve a calm, focused state.

- Jumping, rolling or crashing into a pile of pillows and blankets or onto a "crash pad" (old duvet cover filled with pillows/foam chunks)
- Climbing walls, jungle gyms or poles
- Hanging from monkey bars or a trapeze
- "Sandwich game" - roll child up tightly in a blanket, layer "ingredients" (blankets, pillows) one by one, squeezing from head to toes and back up with each layer.
- "Steam roller game" - while lying on stomach, roll an exercise ball over the child's back from head to toe, have child turn over to back and repeat (be careful to reduce pressure when rolling across stomach).
- Body Squeezes - adult either provides a firm bear hug, or teach the child to give self-hugs
- After bathing—include tight wrap in towel and firm pressure when drying off
- Backrub/Deep-pressure massage
- Stretches
- Yoga poses—especially "Down Dog" "Cat" "Bridge" "Table" and "Mouse"
- Therapy ball activities:
  - Roll back and forth on stomach, pushing from feet to hands
  - Walk outs: on stomach, walk out on arms with a straight back (in the plank position) until ball rolls to ankles, then walk back to start
  - Color/draw/mazes, puzzles, etc. while on stomach over ball, pushing up through non-dominant arm to balance body over ball

- Provide proprioceptive input to the jaw using:
  - Firm plastic straws for chewing
  - Sugar-free chewing gum
  - Chewy snacks: licorice whips, gummies, dried fruit
  - Crunchy snacks: Veggie sticks, pretzels, rice cakes
  - Biting and crunching on ice cubes
- Provide deep pressure using (caution: weighted items should be used on the supervision of an Occupational Therapist and should not exceed 10% of the child's body weight):
  - Weighted or heavy blankets
  - Weighted lap pad (or use large bean bag)
  - Add some weight to the child's backpack
  - Weighted vest or compression/hug vest
- Push/Pull/Carry heavy objects—box of books or toys, help with groceries, weighted basket of laundry, help move furniture to clean under table or behind couch
- Wall push-ups
- Chair/Seat push-ups
- Knee push-ups
- Pressing hands together
- Pulling hands apart
- Standing on hands
- Maintained pushing against a wall
- Roughhousing and wrestling
- Lifting weights or walking with weights
- Hiking with a heavy backpack or daypack
- Playing tug-a-war
- Pushing against another person's arms or legs as that person pushes back
- Chores—help sweep, vacuum, carry laundry basket, wipe down tables or scrub the car with a large sponge

## **Movement:**

These activities provide opportunities for movement, which both increase blood flow (and, therefore, oxygen) to the brain for improved focusing and stimulate the vestibular system. The vestibular sensory system transmits information to the brain from receptors in the inner ear and provides feedback regarding the position of the head relative to the pull of gravity and the direction and velocity of one's movements. Vestibular input/movement activities can be used to calm or alert the nervous system to assist in self-regulation of one's activity level and allow for improved attention when completed prior to school work.

- Running, skipping, galloping
- Hiking, especially when going uphill
- Biking, especially uphill
- Jumping jacks, frog jumps, hopping on 1 foot, hop scotch
- Jumping on a mini trampoline - jog, hop on 1 foot, try feet apart/together
- Hippity-Hop ball - follow path; knock over objects
- Playing on swings or suspended equipment (slow, steady movement in linear directions for calming; fast, rotary movement is alerting)
- Complete obstacle courses
- Ride on scooter board - propel self off stomach (can use hula hoop or rope to pull); use feet while sitting up to move; ride through course and/or knock down boxes or objects
- Somersault or log roll from 1 point to another and back (may also include deep pressure by rolling in a blanket or large towel)
- Gymnastics, swimming, martial arts
- Animal Walks/Actions
  - Bear—arms and legs straight to lumber
  - Crab—arms and legs, knees bent, bottom held off ground
  - Wheelbarrow---child walks on arms, adult holds legs or feet
  - Donkey kicks---child bears weight on hands, kicks legs up in air
  - Snake or Seal---slide on stomach, using only arms to propel body
- Sit in a rocking chair, gently bounce on a therapy ball or use a Sissel seat or Movin' Sit cushion on seat.

### **Other suggestions to facilitate improved attention:**

- Take deep breathes
- Try low lights and very soft white noise for a calming atmosphere
- Routine is important, try to have the same activities occur at the same time each day/night
- Implement checklists as visual reminders for daily responsibilities (i.e. sequence of activities for getting ready for the school day, bedtime activities, etc.)
- Child may need a quick proprioceptive or vestibular activity to transition between activities
- Provide a calm/quiet workspace (fort or tent, can use a large cardboard box) fill with blankets, pillows, bean bag chair, etc to snuggle in.
- Try to decrease excess visual and auditory stimuli in child's room and around the house
- Children with attention challenges are easily distractible. Before giving directions make sure you have their attention and maintain eye contact during verbal instruction.
- Make directions clear and concise. Use simple sentences. Avoid multi-step commands.
- Help your child stay organized: suggest an agenda book or daily assignments book and use this to communicate with teachers.
- Encourage student to keep a clean, clutter free room and homework environment to reduce visual distractions and help them locate belongings promptly.
- Children with attention challenges may be hands on learners. Incorporate as many hands-on learning opportunities as possible.
- **Provide frequent praise for what your child is doing well!**