autism
wellbeing

Our Senses: Proprioception

Proprioception comes from the Latin meaning 'to know oneself'. That is exactly what this sense does. It gives us a sense of where our body is and where our limbs are in relation to each other.

The proprioceptive signals are sent from our muscle spindles, ligaments and joints up to the brain to be processed. For many of us who are autistic these signals can be 'weaker' or 'blurry' which can leave us feeling like we have an unclear sense of where our body is.

If these proprioceptive signals are inconsistent and unpredictable, it can feel alarming and we can be left with a sense of mistrust in our body and its location.

Having increased proprioception supports a sense of embodiment but also can have a calming and regulating impact on the nervous system.

Some great ways to get increased proprioceptive input is to get outdoors and walk, cycle and swim.

During the current situation our opportunities for these kinds of proprioceptive seeking activities have been restricted so here are some activities to get increased proprioceptive inputs at home.

These are ideas and you will need to make your own risk assessments about whether these activities are safe for you or your child. All of these activities are more fun to do together - adults and children alike. Proprioception is regulating for all of us – it will improve our own regulation and our co-regulation with the other people in our households.

Proprioceptive input giving activities are activities that actively move the muscle spindles, ligaments and joints. Here are some suggestions:

Pushing:

Push a wheelbarrow.

Try some press ups.

See if you can all push the wall of your house down!

Put your hands together or against a partner's hands and push as hard as you can.

Pulling:

Tug of war.

Stretch Armstrong toy or Therabands to stretch as hard as you can.

Hang from a door bar or climbing frame to feel the pull in your arms.

Hold hands with a partner and pull against each other.

Moving:

Pogo stick.

Dancing together.

Jumping up and down on a trampoline (but chaotic jumping, spinning and flips are alerting and may over stimulate).

Bump down the stairs on your bottom.

Homemade obstacle courses.

Walk like your favourite animal.

Squeezing:

Deep pressure massage.

Baths – enjoy the water pressure.

Making bread dough or playdough.

Making a 'burger' by squeezing each other between two sofa pillows on the floor or making a human burrito by rolling the person up in a blanket (with their head out of course!)

Active proprioception, where you are actually moving is most regulating but you can do some things passively to give someone proprioceptive input, such as using vibration, or using a gym ball to give someone a massage. Sitting in a bean bag or a hammock that pulls in close to the shape of your body can give you a gentle squeeze and a greater sense of where your body is.

Most of all – have fun! Try incorporating some of the suggestions into games, home-made obstacle courses, housework, gardening, and songs like 'if you're happy and you know it'. Make this a regular part of your day.