SENSORY solutions™

a teacher's guide to PROPRIOCEPTION

Support Self-Regulation with Sensory Solutions

My brilliant little 4-year-old son was asked to draw a house at preschool and burst into tears. Bursting into tears was a common occurrence for him, as was picky eating, banging into things, difficulty transitioning from one task to the next, slouching posture, and what I came to realize were a whole host of **sensory red flags**.

Just as I was learning about how the senses were impacting the kids and families I was working with at the time, sensory processing got very personal. My son would crash his knees into the hardwood floor, he was constantly in motion, chewing on everything, and despite his sweet disposition, he seemed agitated and stressed much of the time.



How does all this relate to not being able to draw a house at preschool?

My eyes were about to be opened to the complexities of the senses, and one system in particular that needed a lot more input: pro-pree-oh-SEP-shun.

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A child who needs more proprioceptive input may:



- Play rough with others
- Bump into people and things
- Climb, crawl, or jump everywhere they can
- Fidget, kick the desk, or have difficulty sitting still
- Seem agitated or distracted during sedentary tasks

I was skeptical at first. I remember sitting in the occupational therapist's office saying, "You're telling me that bouncing on a trampoline will help my child have fewer meltdowns?! What does core strength have to do with handwriting?"

But the more I learned, the more it made sense (no pun intended). We started doing "steam rollers" along his back and big "super slams" before bed. It was physical and full of laughter, just what you would think would amp up a little kid. Instead, he would sigh and say, "Ahhhh. Now I'm ready for sleeps." Building his core strength helped him have the postural stability he needed to write, and chewing gum *still* helps him focus.

I have seen this same journey play out with countless kids since, like Joe. Before getting some proprioceptive tools in his toolbox, Joe was missing whole afternoons of instruction time. His teacher said, "When he's upset, he's gone. Nothing we do can get him back."

They tried all the coping strategies they knew, but they weren't harnessing the power of the senses, especially proprioception.

DID YOU KNOW?

The jumping, crashing, squishing, squeezing, pushing, and pulling that nourish this sense tend to be enjoyable and regulating for most kids.

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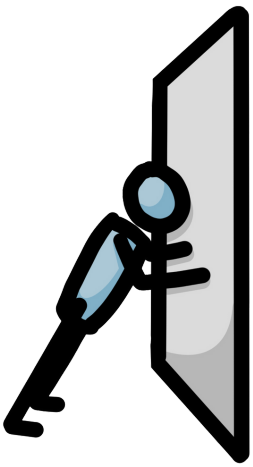
Now, Joe does a few minutes of deep muscle work a couple times each day. His stress management includes proprioceptive input like a little pushing, pulling, bike pedaling, jumping, crab walking, etc. In other words, when understood well...

- Proprioception helps him be learning ready instead of missing instruction and feeling lost with assignments.
- It makes it easier for the teacher to teach.
- It helps the other students not lose class time.

Whole Class Solutions

Because proprioceptive input tends to be regulating for everyone and is critically important for our preschool and elementary students, here are a few options you can incorporate for the whole class or any student who needs a little extra "prope."

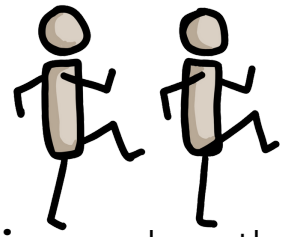
- **Offer flexible seating.** I cannot overstate how helpful this can be. Sitting, standing, wobble cushions, laying down during reading time, resistance bands and seats built for a little rocking can all be tremendously helpful for students. Be sure to teach all your students about the options available to them and how to use these tools to find the "just right" state for their learning brain.
- **Jump to your spot in line then stretch up high.** Once you're all in line with hands high, clap your hands on the sides of your thighs and let them rest there or in your pockets.



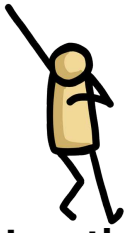
- **Do some wall push-ups between subjects.** Remember to make it playful! None of these strategies should be used as a punishment or negative consequence.
- **Make "French fry fingers" in your lap during circle time.** Have students clasp their hands together, with fingers interlocked. If they need a little movement, they can push and pull on their own hands.

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- **Move your bodies after lunch.** Have young students give themselves a big hug or do a few jumping jacks. For older students, maybe try a plank pose or ask for their suggestions of how to get blood flowing to the brain again.
- **Take a walk or move during transitions** even if students are ending up back at their desks or tables.



- **Have students give feedback physically:**
  - Raise your hand if…
  - Thumbs up or down
  - Everyone stand up. Stay standing if… Sit down if…
- **Move more during times of high energy or emotion,** such as the beginning of the year or before/after a break.
- **Move during lessons:**
  - Toss a soft ball to signal whose turn it is to answer.
  - Create centers for learning or practicing different parts of the lesson (my neurodivergent kids LOVED centers).
  - Find more ideas for young students at **https://www.theactiveeducator.com/blog/movement-and-learning-activities**
- **Take a 2 minute clapping break when energy is low.** Start with a simple pattern and then let a couple students take a turn leading.
- **Engage energetic children in heavy muscle work,** such as moving desks or carrying a heavy box of books to another teacher.
- **Keep a bag of mints around** to offer some regulating proprioceptive input during challenging times of day.
- **If you use a calming corner or regulation space, include options for proprioceptive input, such as:**



  - Lycra sensory body sock
  - Things to squish and squeeze
  - Sugar-free gum or mints
  - A yoga ball or big, squishy pillow
  - Massage tools
- **Use the Bubble Gum Club form** (on the following page) to intentionally incorporate chewing gum as a tool for increased focus.



Find additional resources and recommendations for supporting students' sensory needs in ***Riley the Brave's Sensational Senses***.

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the BUBBLE GUM club

I, _____,

am joining the bubblegum club, using gum as a tool to help me focus.



I will chew gum responsibly.



I will not play with my gum outside my mouth.



I will chew with my mouth closed.



I will not put chewed gum anywhere but the trash.



I will throw my gum in the trash.



I will spit out my gum if it becomes distracting for me or others.

Student signature:_____ Date:_____

Parent/Guardian: Please send in an approved pack of sugar-free gum for your child to use during class. Your signature below indicates that you will help reinforce responsible gum chewing for your child.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

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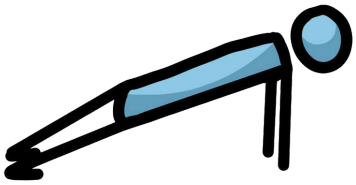
Movement is not just for the littles!

As you get to know this powerful sense, you will begin to see just how often the students in your life are craving proprioceptive input. While secondary students move around between classes, it's not enough! Many of these strategies can be used with older students as well.



Offer choices and take a vote, such as:

- Should we work inside or outside today?
- Stretch break or keep going?
- Chair pose or plank?
- 15 seconds or 30 seconds?



In case you're thinking...

"But you don't know my students. It will be way too chaotic!"

At first, you will need to lead kids back to that "just right" spot after doing some of these activities, especially with younger students. Try slowing your claps down together or pretending to move slowly through thick honey to return to their seats. End with a big, deep, full-body breath with a long exhale as they get back to work.

There's no one-size-fits-all.

While proprioceptive input tends to be helpful and regulating for most, some students will require a little more personalized support. Try making a plan one-on-one or pull in one of their trusted adults to help brainstorm. Be curious together, and I am confident you can find some good ideas to try. Later, reflect together on how it went.

REMEMBER...

It's not us against our students. You and your students are on the same team, working together to light up the learning brain!

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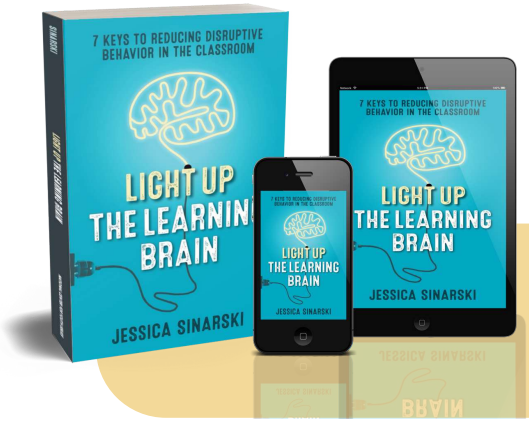
Proprioception (pro-pree-oh-SEP-shun) plays a powerful role in helping us feel safe and in control.

Take some time to reflect on what this means for you and your students. Use the space provided to write down your ideas and next steps.

How will you incorporate proprioception into your classroom routine or school practices?

List any specific students who you think would benefit from more "prope":

What are your next steps for helping to make that happen (routines to change, approvals needed, supportive colleagues to connect with, etc.)?



I'm so glad we're in this together!

JS

Find even more sensory solutions in
Light Up the Learning Brain
(also available in Audiobook format)

www.JessicaSinarski.com/LIGHT

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