



# TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

Support Self-Regulation with  
Sensory Solutions

*proprioception*

*psst...it's not just  
for teachers!*



# 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 promptly 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.**

**Proprioception** is the body's way of knowing where it is in space. It comes from muscles and joints and helps students feel steady, organized, and ready to learn.



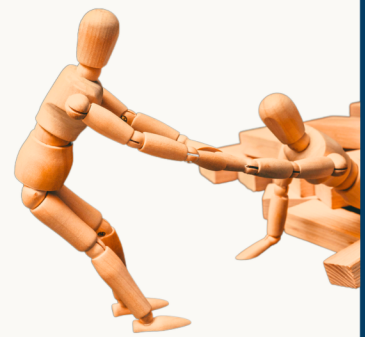
I was skeptical at first. I remember sitting in the occupational therapist's office saying, "You're telling me that bouncing on a trampoline will help my child have fewer meltdowns?! What does core strength have to do with handwriting?"

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."

### **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



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 the hidden senses.**

**Proprioceptive** [pro-pree-oh-SEP-tiv] **Input**—also known as "prope"—is the deep muscle work kids get from lifting, bouncing, swimming, running, squeezing, and even chewing, which can help their bodies calm and their brains focus.

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 walks, etc. In other words, when understood well...

More “prope” helps him be **learning-ready** instead of missing hours of instruction and feeling lost with assignments.

It makes it easier for the teacher to teach.

It helps other students not lose class time due to meltdowns.

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.
- **Make French fry fingers in your lap or around your legs during circle time.** Kids who need a little movement can push and pull on their own hands without bothering their neighbor.
- **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.
- **Take a 1-minute clapping break\*\* when energy is lagging.** Get it started with LAP, CLAP, CROSS, CLAP and then let a couple students offer a pattern to follow.
- **Engage energetic children in heavy muscle work,** such as moving desks or carrying a heavy box of books to another teacher.

*\*\* BONUS: Shared rhythm is regulating for the whole group.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

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

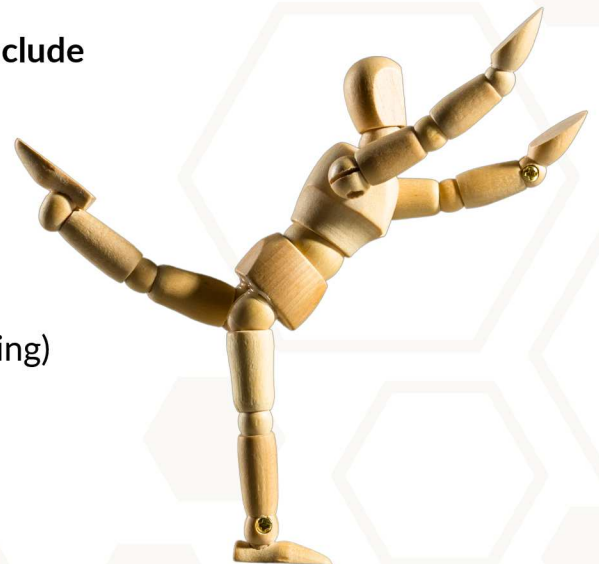




Find additional resources and recommendations for supporting students' sensory needs in [Riley the Brave's Sensational Senses](#) book and [digital resource pack](#).



- **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...
  - Two claps if you agree.
  - Everyone stand up. Stay standing if... Sit down if...
- **Move more during times of high energy or emotion**, such as the beginning of the school year or before and 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>
- **If you use a calming corner or regulation space, include prope-rich options**, such as:
  - Lycra sensory body sock
  - Things to squish and squeeze
  - Yoga ball
  - Massage tools
  - Exercise bands
  - Sugar-free bubble gum (if allowed in your setting)



## 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. Middle and high school students often have some movement built in, such as going to their lockers between classes, but that is not enough! Many of the strategies above can be used with older students as well. Offer choices and take a vote. For example:



- ▶ 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...

***"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 through thick honey super slowly to get back to their seats. End your activity with a big, deep, full body breath with a long exhale as they get back to work.

## When in doubt, go "prope!"

***"If you have a student who is really struggling to find their learning-ready state, make 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."***

Use the planner on the following page to brainstorm how proprioceptive input can support your unique students.

**Thanks for all you do to light up the learning brain!**

*Jessica Sinariski*

BraveBrains Founder & Lead Trainer

A thought bubble containing the text "We'd love to hear your ideas!!" is positioned above a wooden mannequin. The mannequin is shown from the waist up, with its arms raised and hands open, as if in a gesture of surprise or excitement. The mannequin is light-colored wood and is positioned on a white background.

**We'd love  
to hear your  
ideas!!**

   @BraveBrainsOfficial

Tag us on social media and share what's working in your classroom!



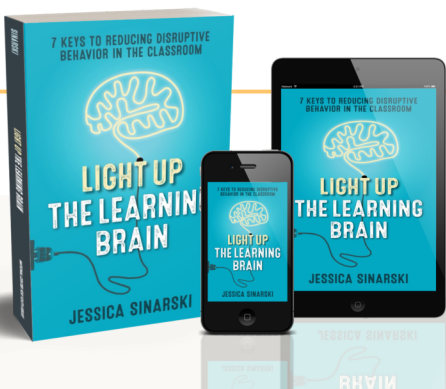
**Proprioception (pro-pree-oh-SEP-shun) plays a powerful role in helping us feel safe and in control.**

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? *(Look over the guide for inspiration)*

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.)?



Find even more sensory solutions in ***Light Up the Learning Brain*** (also available on ***Audible***)

[www.BraveBrains.com/LIGHT](http://www.BraveBrains.com/LIGHT)

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