

Deep pressure to help prevent sensory overload

Information for parents and carers

Applying firm, gentle pressure (**deep pressure**) has a calming effect when it is applied to the whole body - making it easier to cope with anxiety. This is a form of **proprioceptive input**.

Deep pressure may be beneficial for a child who is feeling overloaded because there is too much sensory stimuli around which can lead to sensory overload. Deep pressure can be helpful to calm the child and can also help a child to tolerate touch.

This calming and modulating input has the effect of making the child feel more grounded and lowers their state of arousal. This lowered state of arousal then reduces repetitive self-stimulatory behaviours (such as spinning, hand flapping, and rocking) and allows better focus, concentration, and attention.

Deep pressure can be provided in the following ways (on a trial-and-error basis). It is important to note training is not required to apply some simple deep pressure techniques. As long as this has been discussed and agreed with parents:



- Deep pressure massage can be done with hands or with a pressure foam roller/ spiky massage ball. Apply a firm pressure or squeeze.
- Deep pressure touch (prior to getting dressed or to help calm down when distressed) - Wrapping them up in a blanket/ mat or supporting them to wrap themselves up in a blanket.
- Providing a firm hug or deep massage over the body, it is especially helpful to provide pressure by pushing down gently on the shoulders. This can also be done to just one part of the body (e.g., if a child is struggling to tolerate the feeling of socks/shoes then focus the deep pressure on their feet/ if child struggling to tolerate teeth brushing/ face wash then prepare the area by providing deep pressure around the mouth/jaw area).
- Providing gentle but firm strokes across the body. Start from close to their body then work away e.g. from the shoulder down to the wrist. You can try using different material such as soft brushes for this.
- ‘Sandwich’ them between cushions or bean bags if appropriate – please consider this on child basis.
- Encourage the child to crawl on their hands and knees (can make fun through play e.g., pretend to be an animal / crawling through pop up tunnels).
- Using weighted equipment such as a weighted lap pad, weighted vest, or shoulder snake. ***It is advised a child should be supervised when using weighted items at all times.*** It is important to note that the body and brain adjust to the feeling of weight overtime. Do not expect weighted equipment to be useful and effective for long periods. This is best used intermittently. Consider for 15–20-minute intervals.

Heavy work – for children who seek/ require proprioceptive input

- Start with heavy work prior to completing a tabletop activity/ having a meal/ getting dressed. Warming up the muscles with exercise is a great way to reduce sensitivity. “Heavy work” is any activity that puts deep pressure on the joints of the upper body e.g. pushing a full laundry basket, crawling through a pop-up tunnel, climbing on a frame, monkey bars, frog jumps, jumping on a trampoline, vacuuming, carrying heavy books.

Ideas for the school environment: consider giving the child heavy books to hand out, taking a message to the office, whole class participation with desk/chair pushups. Consider heavy work/ deep pressure before changing for P.E.

Quick fix to calm if distressed

- Weighted equipment with supervision.
- Hands on head and pressing down.
- Deep pressure massage.
- Slow rocking on a rocking chair.
- Snuggling in a small space/ beanbag.
- Sucking yogurt through a straw.
- Bear hugs.

Useful links

Visit the links or scan the QR codes below for further information:

Heavy Work Activities:

www.theottoolbox.com/heavy-work-activities/



‘Proprioceptive’ Sensory Box:

www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/4618/sense-of-body-awareness-sensory-box-ideas.pdf



Everything You Need to Know About Weighted Lap Pads and Blankets:

www.sensoryfriendly.net/weighted-lap-pad/



Children and Young People’s Occupational Therapy Service

