

Compass

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FACT SHEET: Attention & Heavy Work

What is heavy work?

Heavy work refers to tasks that involve heavy resistance for the muscles and joints. It involves proprioceptive input, the awareness of posture, movement, and resistance relating to the body.

Why does it help?

The resistive input obtained through heavy work activities is generally organising and calming for the nervous system.

Doing heavy work can...

- Improve attention and concentration
- Increase the ability to sit still and attend to a task
- Regulate arousal levels
- Improve body awareness
- Increase muscle tone, which can aid seated posture and fine motor control

Who can it help?

- All students can benefit from occasional breaks to aid further concentration on schoolwork.
- Children who have difficulty interpreting proprioceptive input have trouble grading and planning their movements and regulating their level of arousal. They may appear clumsy and uncoordinated, and have an excessive need to crash and bump into objects, walls, and people. They may seem disruptive, full of energy, or even unsafe. These children should be specifically targeted for heavy work.

What is *proprioception*?

Proprioception refers to the body's ability to sense movement within joints and joint position. It enables us to know where our limbs are without looking.



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Heavy work ideas for school

Heavy work activities could involve:

- Whole body actions, like pushing, pulling, [lifting](#) and moving.
- Oral actions, like chewing, sucking and blowing.
- Hand actions, like squeezing, pinching and fidgeting.

Children requiring regulation of their arousal level could be designated any classroom job that involves resistance or weight, such as carrying equipment, fetching the lunch orders, mopping or sweeping, stacking chairs or moving tables, manual pencil sharpening, erasing whiteboard or chalkboard, using watering can or wheelbarrow in the garden.

Try these!

- Tug of war
- Animal walks (e.g. crab walks, bear walks)
- Play-dough/putty/plasticine with presses, molds, and rolling pins
- Paper punching and stapling
- Resistive surfaces for writing (paper over sandpaper, pavement chalks)
- Chewy or crunchy food breaks
- Sip water through straws
- Blowing bubbles
- Twister
- Trampoline or jump rope
- Climb the monkey bars
- Push the classroom walls out
- Colouring in prone position
- Chair push ups
- Squeezy toys

Watch out for...

Activities that involve a lot of head movement can result in hyperactivity! Lots of movement stimulates the vestibular system (through receptors in the inner ear), which increases level of arousal. If your students are already quite mentally alert, try doing activities that focus on fine motor resistance instead of gross motor. Take note of which types of activities arouse or calm your students, and time them to give the greatest benefit.

Handy Websites...

www.sensory-processing-disorder.com/heavy-work-activities.html

[www.sensorystreet.com/uploads/Heavy Work Activities List for Teachers - Elizabeth Haber and Deanna Iris Sava.pdf](http://www.sensorystreet.com/uploads/Heavy_Work_Activities_List_for_Teachers_-_Elizabeth_Haber_and_Deanna_Iris_Sava.pdf)