

Children's Occupational Therapy Service

Heavy Work & Deep Pressure to support participation in everyday activities

What is Heavy work and Deep Pressure?

Heavy work and deep pressure are methods which can be used to provide additional sensory input to a child to help keep their bodies calm, organised and in control when engaged in everyday activities. The resistive or stretching input obtained through heavy muscle work activities and more intensive/prolonged deep pressure can regulate the sensory system and help support a child to be calm, relaxed and to prepare themselves to engage in a range of meaningful daily activities.

When to use Heavy Work and Deep Pressure

Heavy work and deep pressure can be used for a variety of different reasons. It can help improve a child's body awareness, muscle tone and coordination by providing additional input into the proprioceptive sense. (Proprioception is the sensory input and feedback we receive about our body position. Information is passed from receptors in our muscles, joints and tendons to our brain. It gives us a sense of where we are in space and combined with other sensations contributes to the force and timing of activities such as bouncing a tennis ball). Heavy work and deep pressure can also be used to get them ready for learning or engaging in everyday activities by:

- Improved attention/concentration.
- By supporting children and young people who are over or under reactive to sensory experiences.
- Increasing state of alertness.
- Decreasing fidgetiness/restlessness.
- Calming a child when over excited or distressed.
- Overriding perceived unpleasant/uncomfortable sensations.
- Helping settling a child to go to sleep.

Heavy work activities and deep pressure can be carried out prior to an activity that requires the child to maintain focus on a task, remain calm, or when about to engage in a perceived unpleasant tactile activity (e.g. touching glue, having nails cut, brushing teeth). Try to monitor what works for your child in each situation. Heavy work and deep pressure activities may become an effective support strategy for your child.

Below is a list of activities that can be tried out with your child.

When considering these activities, the child's functional level along with an awareness of any safety issues that may be present, must be considered by the responsible adult working with the child/young person.

Lifting and Carrying: Books, sugar/sand/shopping bags, filled boxes, large soft drink bottles, filled laundry baskets, water containers, filled backpacks, stacking or moving chairs, pouring a watering can/hose.

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Ceramics and clay modelling | Squeezing and pinching play dough | Scissors to cut putty, play dough, thick paper |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|

Pushing and Pulling Activities:

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|--------------------------------|
| Shopping trolley | opening heavy doors | play dough to pull and squeeze | pushing up on the chair or against a wall | vacuum cleaner |
| wheely bin | buggy | pull/push toys | Push heavy boxes | scooters |
| 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat' | moving tables and chairs or pushing heavy equipment e.g. mats at gym time. | push of war' between partners (with a large gym ball, each have to try and cross over the line) | push/pull self or others on a jumbo scooter board or lie on your tummy and pull self along a gym bench. | shovel snow, rake leaves, dirt |

In school, be the teacher's helper in class by handing out jotters, moving chairs and setting out gym equipment

Pressing and Squishing (Deep firm pressure)

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| Long firm bear hugs | Massage, self-massage | Staplers, hole punch | Pressure through the shoulders, arms and legs | Toys, vests, wraps, etc |
| Use large blanket to wrap your child up in a swaddling fashion – making sure their head remains out of the blanket | Play a game/puzzle/draw when lying on tummy. | Play dough factory presses and moulds | Heavy rub down with different towels and textures | Use rolling pin to roll out pastry, clay |
| Have a heavy beanbag on the child's lap when sitting at tabletop activities | Lie over ball on their tummy whilst weight bearing through the arms and gently rock forward onto hands and then walk off the ball. | Massage products e.g. vibrating massagers, ball pits and ball pools | 'Sausage roll' –roll child up in a blanket or soft mat so full body deep pressure is provided | 'Steam roll' or 'Flatten the pancake' – roll a large ball over their body whilst lying on tummy |

Pressing and Squishing (Deep firm pressure) continued

| | |
|--|--|
| Sit in beanbag chairs that envelop the body and provide even pressure or with their back against a wall or table during circle time. | 'Squashy sandwich' –make a "sandwich" out of your child between couch cushions. Gently add pressure as you pretend to put on pickles, cheese, lettuce, etc |
|--|--|

Climbing and Hanging

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Jungle gyms, monkey bars | Hanging rings and trapeze | Rough and tumble play | Zip line/flying fox | Rock climbing walls |
| Climbing frames | Climbing on rocks or up trees outside | Climbing up ladder and/or slide | Climbing rope | Cargo nets |

Jumping and Bouncing

| | | | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|------------------|
| Soft play area | Bean bag chairs | Therapy ball | Pogo stick | Moon shoes |
| Hopping ball | Horse riding | Skipping rope | Sack races | Floor gymnastics |
| Happy hop ball | Trampolines or trampette supervised | Foam hopscotch pads | | |

Craft Activities

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Cutting or tearing heavy paper or card | Making texture rubbings e.g. tree bark, coins | Drawings with paper over a textured surface such as corrugated card |
|--|---|---|

Household Activities

| | | | |
|---|---|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Kneading bread dough | Squeezing sponges or cloths, etc | Shaking out a duvet | Drawing on a high easel or blackboard |
| Throwing and catching heavy balls, beanbags | Play or work above shoulder height e.g. stacking cans on high shelves | | |

Leisure/Sport Activities (supervised and at their level of ability)

| | | | | |
|----------------|---------|----------|--------------|------------|
| Roller skating | Cycling | Swimming | Horse riding | Tennis |
| Squash | Cricket | Dancing | Karate, Judo | Gymnastics |