

tinkergarten®

AT HOME

WEEK OF APRIL 6

This Week's Topic: **Sensory System**
Today's Focus: **The Hidden Senses**



The Design Behind this Week

Everyone made quite a splash last week with amazing water play, and sensory systems across the country got a beautiful boost! This week, we'll continue to support sensory learning, but we'll focus on two "hidden" senses called **proprioception** and **vestibular**. These senses both involve movement, and, even though we often overlook them, they have a major impact on how kids learn. This week, we've designed play lessons that make it easy to support these often easy-to-miss senses!



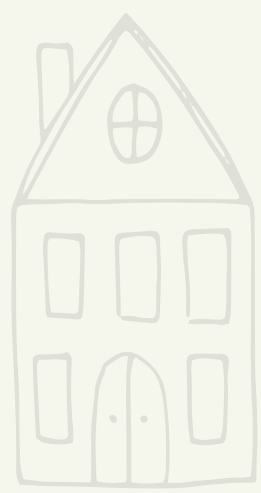
This Week's Focus: The Hidden Senses

A simple way to think about [proprioception](#) is the sensing of pressure in the joints, ligaments and muscles of the body. Proprioception is activated when our body presses against something and gets feedback. Young children get this from a wide range of actions, including crawling, chewing, running, stomping, jumping, climbing, pushing, pulling, or stretching. Proprioception helps us maintain awareness of where our body parts are in space and gives us a feeling of being centered.

Centered in the inner ear, the [vestibular system](#) is triggered when we change the position of our heads. Moving the head in any direction activates vestibular receptors and sends information which helps our brain tell our body to adjust as we move. We use vestibular input to support

our balance, our muscle tone, our eye movements when we look from one thing to another, and to help us move without falling or bumping into things. The vestibular system also helps us to focus our attention and to coordinate the function of other senses.

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Main Activity

Get From Here to There



One of the great things about both of these hidden senses is that they are most easily activated when we move around a lot — and we all know that moving and grooving always works for our little wiggly friends.

We also know that obstacle courses are a forever favorite in many homes and can easily set the stage for fantastic active play at any age. Here's how to kick off this week:

1. Pick a space in which to play (inside, outside, a combination of both).
2. Set up a “course” or series of physical challenges that kids will take on to get from “here to there.”
3. As you set up physical challenges, aim to include one of each of the following:
 - ☐ Something to **go over** (e.g stump or piece of wood, box, couch, mountain of pillows, stack of books, bucket)
 - ☐ Something to **go under** (e.g. table, low tree branch, bush, blanket or sheet draped over two objects, a tunnel made of boxes or sticks)
 - ☐ Something to **balance on** (stack of books, one foot, a log, an uneven rock, two branches in a cross shape, broom handle)
 - ☐ Something to **walk along** (e.g. coil of rope, stretched out ribbon, strip of tape, row of pillows, line of coins, line of rocks)
 - ☐ Something they have to **get into** a container. (e.g. ball into a bowl, acorns into a box, stuffed animal into a basket, a smaller box into a bigger box, a rock inside a circle made of twigs)
 - ☐ Some way to move from **here to there** (maybe they have to: stomp, jump, spin, roll, kick, crawl, hop, tiptoe, “fly,” lunge)



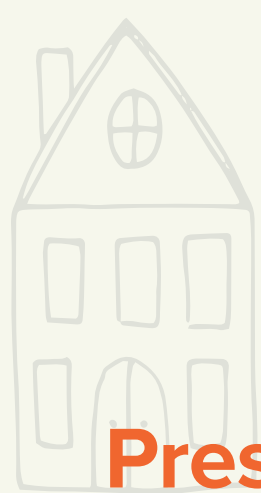
Independent Extensions

Below we've included some fun ways to modify the environment we set up to help kids move, challenge their bodies, and activate their "hidden" senses. No matter how kids play this week, notice and lean into supporting opportunities for them to use their muscles and joints or to change the position of their heads.

Babies/Toddlers

- **Got tummy time?** We hear tummy time is good for babies, but how cool to notice that tummy time means that baby's muscles are getting feedback from the ground and their head is tilting — hidden senses activated! To inspire a little extra tummy time, get down with your baby or toddler and slither together like snakes or wiggle like worms.
- **Got something to chew on?** Oral exploration of objects is not only a way to learn about objects by their taste and feel, but it activates your baby or toddler's jaw, which stimulates proprioception. [Learn more about safe mouthing](#) and provide a range of objects to mouth—or, even better to taste! For example, try: berries, herbs, citrus slices, cinnamon sticks (great for teething woes, too!), watermelon, etc.
- **Got forest putty** (i.e. play dough)? Squeezing putty is not only a super fun way to activate touch, but it activates joints in the hands and stimulates touch, smell and sight to boot.
- **Got drums?** Whether or not you have a proper drum, sticks can turn virtually any surface, indoor or out, into a drum. Beat your drums as you sing or listen to music and encourage wee ones to bounce or bop along!





Preschoolers and Up

- **Got a parade?** Try our [Make Music Like Wild Things](#) activity for easy ways to make your own instruments. Then launch a parade, marching and stomping around as you sing, shake and drum.

- **Got a garden?** Welcome kids to dig in the dirt or even join you in gardening this week. Working in the dirt or garden not only makes kids feel productive, but it automatically activates joints and muscles and naturally gets kids to move their heads up and down.

- **Got a spiral?** Spirals are super compelling, invite movement and even have a calming effect on us. Use tape, string, rope or even sticks or other nature objects to create a spiral on the ground. Model how to walk in and out of it, and just let kids interact with it in whatever way they choose. Welcome them to add to the spiral, draw spirals or build spirals of their own.

- **Got a teddy bear?** Add an imaginative twist by turning your obstacle course into a “[Bear Hunt](#)”. Start by leveraging a fantastic story we love — [Going on a Bear Hunt](#). Then, lay out your own series of obstacles that you can tie into the story. Lastly, make the story come to life and ham it up! Kids will get as much physical challenge as you offer, get lost in the fun and beg to bear hunt again and again.

- **Got big kid muscles?** There are easy ways to set up fun situations that add a little heavy work to our kids’ play. Stack a bunch of rocks or logs at one side of the yard and welcome kids to move them to the other side. Pile all of the books down the hall and wonder how to get them all back into the bookshelf. Or, move all of the living room furniture to one side of the room one night. The next morning, work together to put it all back (after you’ve done a little dancing in the open space!).

- **Got yarn?** Take yarn, string or twine and weave it back and forth between the furniture in a room, or between trees or other objects outside. Give kids space and time to move their bodies in and out of the strands. Leave extra yarn around so kids can add strands as well. Want to add an animal twist? Pretend to be busy spiders spinning a life-size web!





School-Age Kids

- **Got pulleys?** Use rope and a basket or bucket to set up a simple pulley over a low tree limb. Wonder how adding different objects to the basket changes the way the pulley behaves. Click [here](#) for more ideas and experiments to enjoy with pulleys.
- **Got a board?** Place a board on top of a small log or block. Enjoy teetering and tottering back and forth to find your balance. Experiment with how things change when someone else hops on too, when the block is moved, or when you use blocks that are taller.
- **Got a plan?** Put older kids in the driver's seat and challenge them to use whatever you have in the house, the garage or the yard to make an obstacle course for you or for their siblings.
- **Got a jump shot?** Leaping and jumping are terrific ways to get proprioceptive and vestibular input. Welcome kids to stage spectacular jumps. Maybe they jump off of tall objects, across large spaces or into muddy puddles. Welcome kids to challenge themselves to make great leaps this week. And, if you are up for it, give them a phone or other camera to record their jump shots on video. Share these with grandparents and friends, too!

Grandparents

We continue to celebrate the chance to include grandparents to help in our play. This week, welcome them to help create obstacle courses by providing suggestions for what the different obstacles could be. If they themselves are able to be physically active, have kids design a course that grandparents can set up in their house (complete with a little walking tour of the space so kids can see the props available to them!) and then the kids can watch them complete it and vice-versa.

Literacy Connections

Many wonderful books and songs can inspire kids to move. This week, watch and listen to two of our favorites read aloud — See Leader, Elizabeth Dickerson, read [From Head to Toe](#) by Eric Carle and Tinkergarten teammate, Emily Helfgot, read [There Is a Tribe of Kids](#) by Lane Smith. You can also sing, imagine and move to the [Come to Tinkergarten](#) song!

Share Your Experiences!

Join us LIVE on Tuesday, April 7th at 11:30am ET on the [Tinkergarten Facebook page](#). Share photos and stories of your experiences and time outside this week using #tinkergarten and #outdoorsall4. Share in our free [#OutdoorsAll4 Facebook](#) group, and we may just feature your photos in next week's email!

About Tinkergarten

Tinkergarten® is a breakthrough method of raising kids, helping families make the most of the critical window of childhood with simple, fun and engaging outdoor play experiences that are designed for learning.

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