

How "heavy work" supports kids' sensory systems

This week, we'll focus on using big muscles and "heavy work" play to help kids take on challenges, find their own limits, and activate one of their two "hidden senses" called **proprioception**.



Proprioception

A simple way to think about proprioception is the sensing of pressure in the joints, ligaments and muscles of the body. Proprioception helps us maintain awareness of where our body parts are in space and gives us a feeling of being centered.

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.

[Learn More](#)



How can this be helpful?

We use our sense of **proprioception** for most daily tasks, including walking, sitting up, getting a cup full of water successfully to our mouths, giving a hug with the right pressure or playing a game of tag with friends!

Kids are still learning how to manage their bodies, how to interact, and how to perform nearly every daily task, so this need for coordination and the right amount of pressure is critical for them.

Getting the right level of **proprioceptive input** also helps kids' brains and bodies to feel settled and focused—something all kids need in order to learn!



"Heavy work" activities that support proprioception

Fortunately, the great outdoors are full of opportunities for kids to gather proprioceptive input. Here are some of our favorite outdoor "hard work" activities that support proprioception:

- Toddling, walking, or running
- Climbing on logs, rocks, or [trees](#)
- [Throwing/catching balls](#)
- [Fort play](#)
- [Hauling sticks](#) and other building materials
- Wheelbarrow walking or just crawling or spending time on all fours
- Jumping, stomping, and parading about
- Moving through an [obstacle course](#)
- Transporting heavy objects (e.g., tree limbs, sticks, logs, rocks) around
- Carrying a bag or backpack with objects inside
- [Moving heavy objects up and down in a pulley](#)
- Squeezing and molding [forest putty](#)
- Giving nice, strong hugs (our favorite)

