

Recommendations

The proprioceptive system is responsible for sensing the position, movement, and force of our body parts. It relies on receptors in muscles, tendons, and joints to provide feedback to the brain about how our body is positioned and how much effort is required for movement. This system is fundamental to our sense of felt safety, as it provides a deep, internal sense of grounding and control over our body in space.

For children who experience hypervigilance—a state of heightened alertness often linked to trauma—the proprioceptive system can become a critical tool for self-regulation. Engaging in proprioceptive activities can help calm or energise the nervous system, depending on the type of input, making it a versatile sensory system for managing emotional and physiological states.



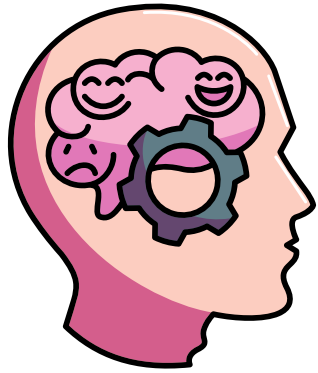
What might you notice

- **Clumsiness or frequent falls:** Children may struggle with spatial awareness, leading to bumps into furniture or peers, and an overall lack of coordination during physical activities.
- **Difficulty with tasks requiring fine motor skills:** Struggles with activities like writing, cutting with scissors, or buttoning clothes may arise, often due to poor hand-eye coordination & feedback on the body.
- **Inconsistent body positioning:** Children may have difficulty maintaining appropriate posture while sitting or standing, often appearing slouched, or a constant re-adjustment of their seating position.
- **Over- or under-reactivity to physical touch:** Some children may be overly sensitive to physical contact, resulting in avoidance of certain activities, while others may seek out excessive movement or rough play to regulate their sensory input.
- **Poor spatial awareness:** Difficulty navigating space, which can lead to issues in organising personal belongings or following directions in a classroom setting.



Impact on learning

- **Reduced focus and attention:** Children may struggle to concentrate during lessons due to constant distractions caused by physical discomfort or an inability to find a stable posture.
- **Challenges with group activities:** Difficulty with coordination and spatial awareness can make group games or collaborative tasks tricky at times.
- **Handwriting challenges:** Challenges in tasks requiring fine motor skills may result in difficulties with writing, drawing, or completing written work.
- **Increased fatigue:** Struggling to maintain balance and coordination may lead to physical exhaustion, making it harder for children to participate actively in learning throughout the day.
- **Behavioural needs:** Frustration stemming from difficulties with proprioception may manifest as tricky behaviours, including dysregulated responses or withdrawal, impacting classroom dynamics and relationships with peers and teachers.



The Link Between Poor Body Awareness (Proprioception) and Emotional Regulation

For children who have experienced developmental trauma, having a poor sense of body awareness—also known as proprioception—can really affect how they manage their emotions. Proprioception is all about our ability to know where our body is and how it moves in space. This feedback is super important for helping us feel grounded and secure, especially when children are feeling stressed, anxious, or triggered by something. But when their proprioceptive awareness isn't quite there, it can leave them feeling confused and disoriented.

When children can't feel feedback on their bodies properly, it can make emotional regulation much harder. They might struggle to understand how they're feeling or how to respond to different situations. This can lead them to look for proprioceptive input in ways that aren't always helpful. For example, when a child kicks an object, they get immediate feedback to their foot from that action. This can be reassuring for a child who feels disoriented or disconnected from their body, as it gives them a moment of clarity and connection to their body. However, while these actions, like kicking or hitting, might seem disruptive, they're really just a way for children to try and get that feedback they need.

Sometimes, these behaviours can escalate, leading to situations where physical restraint or 'safe holds' are used to manage their actions. While this might provide a sense of security and proprioceptive feedback in the moment, it can also create a confusing experience for the child, making them feel helpless or triggering past trauma. That's why it's so important to find better ways to meet their proprioceptive needs.

By understanding how proprioception links to emotional regulation, teachers and caregivers can implement strategies that help children develop a better sense of their bodies. Offering safe and positive proprioceptive experiences such as deep pressure activities, heavy work tasks, or regular sensory breaks, can really support their emotional regulation and help them feel more stable. When we help children strengthen their connection between their physical selves and their emotions, we're setting them up to navigate their feelings in a healthier, more adaptive way.

