

LADC Behavior Handout

Heavy Work Strategies



Learn to Utilize a Variety of Activities to Preventatively or Reactively Calm a Child's Body

Dr. Jenna Edlund

Proprioception input occurs when we lift, jump, pull, carry, hug, snuggle, crash, climb, push, etc. All of these various movements incorporate the muscles and joints and offer “heavy work” input. Heavy work exercises tend to have a calming and organizing effect on the body. Many kids relax, calm down, and can even improve their attention when they get the appropriate amount of proprioceptive input.

When children actively crave and seek proprioceptive input, they may seek it out in ways that are not safe such as crashing into or jumping off things. Therefore, by proactively providing them with the input, they can feel calmer and improved regulation to engage in classroom activities.

Signs a Child Could Benefit from Heavy Work Activities

- Fidgeting when asked to sit quietly.
- An activity level or arousal level.
- Seeking intense proprioceptive input by “crashing and bashing” into anything.
- Flapping their hands.
- Using too much force on objects or people.
- “No fear” when jumping or walking downstairs.
- Sitting down too hard or missing chairs when sitting.
- Falling out of their seat.
- Fluctuating between over-reacting and under-reacting in response to stimulation.
- Constantly on the move.
- Difficult time staying seated
- Might appear playing ‘aggressive’
- Craving tight hugs/squeezes
- Accidentally breaking toys or classroom materials
- Likes to jump, stomp, bounce when walking in the halls
- Loves gym and recess
- Constantly on the go
- Body movements may appear ‘clumsy’
- Uses a lot of pressure when writing/coloring
- Squeezing arms, fingers/hands, applying pressure to the head/pulling hair

Heavy Work Activities



The first preventative strategy that all teachers can have in their classroom is by placing 1-3 sets of contact paper cut-outs of hands around the room on walls. You can preventatively guide a child over to the wall to push against the handprints a few times if their body seems to have a lot of energy, or you can help them go to the wall to practice “getting their pushes out” after they pushed a friend or were aggressive when playing with a friend. This provides an appropriate outlet for children to learn to get their proprioceptive needs met or work through negative emotions.

Heavy Work Transition Ideas - Walking in the Halls

- Penguin Walks
- Pretending to Drive a Car – holding arms out front and turning the steering wheel
- Move like Frankenstein - put your arms out in front and stomp your feet.
- Quietly walk on tiptoes
- Choo - Choo! - Move your arms in circles like train wheels.
- Fly like an airplane

Heavy Work Activities with Materials

- Tug-of-war: Can be done in a variety of positions such as standing, sitting, kneeling, or laying on tummy
- Fill a milk jug with various amounts of sand or rice and have a child carry it from one side of the room to the other.
- Being scrunched in a bean bag chair
- Tossing and catching heavy bean bags
- Pulling resistance bands with hands
- Playing tug of war with Squigz
- Weighted backpack for a few minutes
- Staple paper
- Push against a wall.
- Balance on a line like you are on a balance beam

Heavy Work Activities that Don't Need Materials

- Army crawl from one line to another
- Push the doorway: Stand in the doorway and push against the sides of it as hard as possible with one arm on each side. See how many seconds they can push.
- Bear hugs to themselves or a teacher to the child
- Stair climbs
- Row Your Boat. Have two children play "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" sitting on the floor, holding hands, pushing and pulling each other.
- Timed Tasks: Record how many jumps, hops, knee lifts, or claps, that they can do in a minute.
- Wheelbarrow walks: child places hand on floor, grown-up holds child's legs off floor and helps them walk with only their hands on the floor. Child should keep fingers facing forward as much as possible. Easier = hold child's legs at knees or hips, harder = hold child's legs at the ankles

Pretend Play Heavy Work Activities

- Roll across the floor like a burrito
- Crazy Glue: Have child try to move their body while pretending different body parts are glued to floor.
- Egg rolls: Have the child lay on the floor with their legs to their chest, clasping their hands around their legs. Rock back and forth gently, trying to not crack the egg.
- Popcorn: Squat down low then pop up like popcorn
- Wet Dog - Shake your body all over like a wet dog.
- Superman Pose on floor
- Animal Walks - (bear walks, crab walks, snake crawls, frog jumps)