

Emotional regulation and movement



Understanding children's sensory needs

Did you know?

We actually have more than 5 senses



Sight



Taste



Touch



Sound



Smell



Interoception



Vestibular



Proprioception
Body awareness

Beyond sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, children also use vestibular, proprioception and interoception to understand their world.

Why movement matters?

- Helps children feel secure in their bodies.
- Supports children's coordination, attention and emotional regulation.
- Develops problem-solving and decision-making skills.

When children feel regulated they are ready to learn and play.



Proprioception

(Body awareness)



This sense tells us where we are in space. It helps with movement, coordination and regulation. It is how we perceive pressure in our joints and muscles.

What it might look like

Seeker

(Under responder)

- Prefers tight hugs or clothing
- Enjoys crashing into objects
- Clumsy, tripping, bumping or falling frequently
- Struggles to sit still

Sensitive

(Over responder)



- Needs space
- Avoids physical or messy play
- Appears cautious or fearful

Why this matters

- Children may struggle to sit down during group time
- Finds transitions difficult
- Becomes dysregulated or unsettled

Activities for a seeker - "Crashers"

- Pulling or pushing i.e. wall push-ups
- Play dough and squeezing
- Climbing and jumping
- Animal walks
- Tug of war



Supports for sensitive children

- Clear boundaries around touch
- Smaller group environments
- Lower music volume / wearing of headphones
- Predictable structure
- Visual schedules



 **Tip** Great before transitions or learning

Vestibular

(Balance and movement)



Located in inner ear, it maintains balance and spatial orientation using head motion and position. It is how we perceive motion.

What it might look like

Seeker

(Under responder)



- Seeks movement e.g. rocking, swinging, bouncing
- Clumsiness or difficulty with balance and coordination
- Poor posture
- Enjoys upside-down play

Sensitive

(Over responder)



- Too much movement can be overwhelming
- Often gets car sick
- May have a fear of swinging or spinning

Why this matters

Vestibular processing helps children to:

- Develop balance and coordination
- Build confidence in movement-based tasks
- Participate in active play.

Activities for a seeker- "Spinners"

- Swings
- Jumping on a trampoline
- Rolling games
- Obstacle course
- Dancing
- Balance beam

Activities for sensitive children

- Predictable structure
- Visual schedules
- Clear boundaries around touch
- Smaller group environments
- Lower music volume / wearing of headphones



If you need further support, you can seek the support of a paediatric Occupational Therapist.

Created in collaboration with For Love of Dance.

Reference: Pass The OT 2025, Vestibular system vs proprioception: Key differences and insights – Study topic overview, 13 March, <<https://passtheot.com/study-topics/vestibular-system-vs-proprioreception-key-differences-and-insights-study-topic-overview/>>.

