



# THE VALUE OF CHILDREN'S

# play

## FOR DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S VESTIBULAR AND PROPRIOCEPTIVE SYSTEMS



### A FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS



#### Introduction:

Play is an essential part of childhood development, offering numerous benefits for children's physical, cognitive, and social well-being. This fact sheet highlights the importance of play in developing the vestibular and proprioceptive systems, two crucial sensory systems that support body awareness, coordination, and motor skills.

#### What is the Vestibular System?

The vestibular system, located within the inner ear, plays a crucial role in maintaining balance, coordinating movement, and understanding spatial orientation. Engaging in specific play activities can stimulate and strengthen the development of this system.

#### Play Activities that Develop the Vestibular System:

##### SWINGING AND ROCKING:

Activities like swinging on a swing set, riding in a rocking chair, using a hammock, or rocking a child in your arms, provide gentle vestibular stimulation, helping children develop balance and coordination skills.

**SPINNING AND TWIRLING:** Encouraging children to spin or twirl around or do this on play equipment designed for that purpose helps stimulate the vestibular system and enhances a child's ability to handle changes in motion.

**TUMBLING AND ROLLING:** Playful activities such as somersaults and rolling down hills, promote body awareness, coordination, and a stronger response to changes in orientation.

#### What is the Proprioceptive System?

The proprioceptive system provides information about body position and movement by sensing muscle length, joint angle, and force. Developing this system through play leads to better body awareness, coordination, and motor control.

#### Play Activities that Develop the Proprioceptive System:

##### CLIMBING AND CRAWLING:

Encouraging children to climb on playground equipment, crawl under or through obstacles helps develop their proprioceptive abilities and strengthen muscles and joints.

##### ACTIVE PLAY AND GAMES:

Participating in games and physical activities that involve running, jumping, and throwing allows children to continually challenge and improve their proprioceptive skills.

##### BALANCING AND COORDINATION

**CHALLENGES:** Providing opportunities for children to walk on balance beams, navigate obstacle courses, or play with balance boards and wobble cushions can enhance their proprioceptive system and promote better balance and coordination.





## What are the benefits of developing the Vestibular and Proprioceptive Systems through Play?

- **IMPROVED BALANCE AND COORDINATION:** Developing these sensory systems enhances children's ability to maintain balance, adapt to changes in position, and perform coordinated movements.
- **BETTER BODY AWARENESS:** Children who engage in play activities that stimulate the vestibular and proprioceptive systems have increased body awareness, allowing for more precise control of their movements.
- **ENHANCED MOTOR SKILLS:** Developing these systems through play supports the refinement of motor skills, including fine and gross motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and spatial awareness.
- **EMOTIONAL REGULATION:** Play activities that engage the vestibular and proprioceptive systems can help children regulate their emotions and promote a sense of calmness and focus.

## How can I support the development of my child's Vestibular and Proprioceptive system?

**1. ENCOURAGE MOVEMENT:** Provide opportunities for your child every day to engage in various physical activities, such as running, jumping, swinging, and climbing. Even babies need opportunity to move, so ensure they are not restricted by blankets and clothes so they can kick and move their body. Babies also benefit from rocking movements.

**2. ENGAGE IN SENSORY PLAY:** Incorporate activities that involve different textures, weights, and resistances, such as playing with sand, dough, mud, or water. This type of play can be whole body, from building a sandcastle to experiencing sand between your toes or grass beneath your feet.

**3. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES** for rough and tumble play: Allow your child to engage in safe rough and tumble play, like wrestling or play-fighting. This type of play helps develop proprioceptive skills and body awareness.

**4. ENCOURAGE OUTDOOR PLAY:** Encourage your child to spend time outdoors, engaging in activities like riding a bike or exploring nature.

Outdoor play provides a wide range of sensory experiences and challenges for the vestibular and proprioceptive systems. Time to wander and explore provides a range of movement and sensory experiences.



**5. ALLOW FREE MOVEMENT:** Give your child opportunities for unstructured play and free movement. Avoid over-restricting their movement or relying solely on electronics, as this can limit the development of their sensory systems. Children under 2 years should not have access to electronics.

**6. CONSULT WITH AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST:** If you have concerns about your child's vestibular and proprioceptive development, consider consulting with an occupational therapist. They can provide personalised strategies and exercises to support your child's specific needs. Remember that each child is unique, so it's essential to observe their preferences and abilities when supporting their development.

## An important message for you to share...

Play is a powerful tool for children's overall development, even young babies benefit from play.

Through play, the growth and refinement of the vestibular and proprioceptive systems can be achieved.

By providing opportunities for swinging, spinning, balancing, climbing, and other playful activities, adults can support their children's development of body awareness, coordination, balance, and motor skills.

Encouraging both structured and unstructured play experiences ensures these sensory systems receive the stimulation necessary for healthy growth and development.



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[PlayAustralia.org.au](http://PlayAustralia.org.au)