

We have observed that an increasing number of children are needing additional support with sensory integration and therefore are consistently incorporating specific activities designed to assist with body awareness and proprioception or which provide tactile and vestibular stimulation.

School readiness and sensory integration are interconnected concepts that play significant roles in a child's ability to succeed academically and socially in a classroom setting.

You can help your child by incorporating such activities into your daily routines. This is especially important if your child will commence Kindergarten next year and we will share some ideas to assist you with this.

If your child struggles with sensory integration, maintaining attention, organisation, emotional regulation, needs a lot of stimulation, or is oversensitive, doing an OT (Occupation Therapy) assessment is always a good idea as your child will benefit immensely from early intervention.

All children generally enjoy such sensory activities and stimulation and will benefit from associated activities. Less screen time and more active play is key.

### **School Readiness:**

This term encompasses a range of skills and abilities that a child should ideally possess before starting formal schooling. These include cognitive skills like language development, pre-math and pre-literacy skills, as well as social and emotional competencies such as the ability to follow instructions, cooperate with peers, and regulate emotions.

### **Sensory Integration:**

This refers to the process by which the brain receives, organizes and interprets sensory information from the environment. This includes sensory inputs from sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, as well as inputs related to movement and balance (vestibular) and body position (proprioception) .

Sensory integration is crucial for performing everyday tasks smoothly, engaging in social interactions effectively and is vital for learning.

The relationship between school readiness and sensory integration lies in how sensory processing abilities can influence a child's readiness for learning:

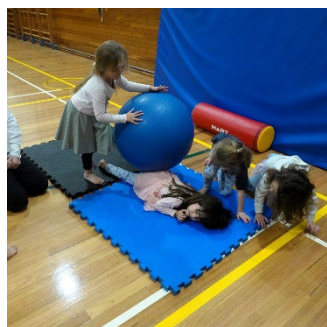
**Attention and Concentration:** Sensory integration difficulties can impact a child's ability to sustain attention and concentrate in a classroom environment, affecting their readiness to engage with academic tasks.

**Fine and Gross Motor Skills:** Sensory integration plays a key role in the development of motor skills necessary for tasks such as writing, drawing, and participating in physical education activities, all of which are essential for school readiness. Gross motor skills are foundational for later fine motor skills.

**Social Interaction:** Sensory processing abilities can affect a child's social interactions with peers and teachers. For example, a child who is oversensitive to visual or auditory sensory stimuli may become easily overwhelmed in group settings, while a child who seeks sensory input excessively may struggle with understanding personal space and social boundaries.

**Self-Regulation:** Sensory integration difficulties can interfere with a child's ability to regulate their emotions and behaviour, which are essential for participating in classroom activities and following classroom rules.

Interventions that focus on improving sensory integration skills can enhance a child's readiness for school by addressing sensory processing difficulties that may otherwise hinder their ability to learn and participate effectively in the classroom. These interventions may include sensory-based therapies, environmental modifications, and targeted strategies to support sensory processing and self-regulation skills.



'Waschstrasse / Car wash'  
(Tactile stimulation, body awareness & Proprioception)

The child lies down on a mat or carpet and various objects (light and heavy) are gently rolled over the body from top to bottom and back.

### 'Deckenrutschen'

Pull your child along on a blanket and include changes in direction. Also let your child pull heavier items on the blanket to build muscle strength.

Pushing and pulling heavy objects are a great way to build proprioception, so is 'Schubkarrelaufen' ( Wheelbarrows) (holding up your child's feet while he or she is stretched out walking on their hands).



Swinging and rocking stimulates the vestibular sense. If you provide your child with a hammock, it is a good idea to use the kind we have at preschool (without stick), so that the fabric can wrap around your child's body which aids proprioception, the child clearly feels its boundaries. Swinging on swings, spinning on tire swings, or using spinning toys like Sit 'n' Spins also provide vestibular sensory input, which can help with balance, coordination, and body awareness. Lying on the swing, while collecting items off the ground strengthens sensory integration and builds core strength. To successfully collect items while lying on a swing, children must develop spatial awareness and depth perception. They learn to judge distances and adjust their movements accordingly.

**Animal Walks:** Encourage children to imitate animal movements like bear walks (walking on hands and feet), crab walks (walking sideways on hands and feet), or frog jumps. These movements involve weight-bearing activities that enhance proprioception.

Scooters and balance bikes are a great way to improve core strength and balance, both needed to maintain a good posture when working at a desk during school hours.

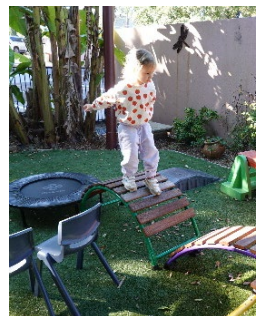


**Obstacle Courses:** Set up simple obstacle courses that involve crawling under tables, climbing over cushions, balancing on a beam, and jumping over hurdles. These activities help children develop body awareness and coordination.

**Heavy Work Activities:** Include activities that involve pushing, pulling, and lifting. For example, carrying a basket of toys, pushing a small wheelbarrow with blocks, or pulling a wagon filled with soft toys. These activities provide deep pressure input to joints and muscles, which enhances proprioceptive feedback.



**Games with Resistance:** Play games that involve resistance, such as tug-of-war with a soft rope, pushing against a wall, or playing with stretchy bands. These activities provide proprioceptive input through resistance against muscles and joints.



Provide clear verbal cues and feedback during activities to help children become aware of their body position, movements, and the effort they are exerting. Encourage them to describe how their body feels during different activities.

**Gross motor skills form the basis for developing effective Fine motor skills**, which are crucial for a child's overall development and are essential for performing everyday tasks with precision and control. They involve the coordination of hand movements with visual information. Developing these skills enhances eye-hand coordination, which is important for tasks that require accuracy and spatial awareness.

**Fine motor skills** play a significant role in academic readiness, particularly in activities like writing, drawing, colouring, and using scissors. Proficiency in these tasks supports early literacy and numeracy development. Good fine motor skills are essential for legible handwriting. Children need the dexterity and control to form letters and numbers accurately and consistently. Fine motor skills are necessary for tasks related to self-care, such as buttoning clothes, tying shoelaces, zipping up jackets, and opening lunch boxes. Fine motor skills complement gross motor skills and contribute to a child's overall physical development. They support coordination, control, and refinement of movements, which are essential for overall physical competence.



Fine motor skills (muscle strength and dexterity) are developed when children manipulate construction toys, play dough, kinaesthetic sand or dough when baking. A sensory bin with many different objects provides tactile stimulation. Children can explore these bins with their hands, practicing tactile discrimination and sensory exploration. Ballons filled with different materials (sand, dried peas or lentils, cotton wool, rice,...) are fun to squish and strengthen fine motor muscles.



Encourage your child to use pencils, crayons, chalk, scissors and glue regularly. It is a good idea to always have art and craft materials available to children, as with increased use the children develop dexterity and skill. This is important to be able to develop an effective grip and sufficient fine muscle strength to be able to use a pencil over an extended period.



**Books:**

**"Sensory Integration and the Child"** by A. Jean Ayres: This classic text by Ayres, an occupational therapist and neuroscientist, outlines her theory and approach to sensory integration.

**"Understanding Sensory Dysfunction: Learning, Development and Sensory Dysfunction in Autism Spectrum Disorders, ADHD, Learning Disabilities and OCD"** by Liz McKendrick: This book explores sensory processing issues in the context of various neurodevelopmental disorders.

Ingelid Brand, Erwin Breitenbach  
Vera Maisel: **Integrationsstörungen: Diagnose und Therapie im Erstunterricht** Paperback – 1 Jan. 1997

**Please note that whilst all these activities will contribute positively to your child's overall development and preparation for school, they cannot replace targeted OT sessions which some children will need if they are struggling with aspects of their development.**