

## Deep Pressure and Weighted Therapy

Deep pressure works on the touch system. Some children need more deep pressure activities to help them feel calm and know where their body is in space.

Deep pressure can be passively 'applied' to a child or can be 'active' in partnership with proprioception (using muscles and joints). Passive strategies tend to calm children and active strategies tend to help organise children.

All strategies should be introduced initially when the child is happy. **A child should always have the choice to not take part in any activity. If a child is unhappy with any strategy, stop immediately.** It is up to the supporting adult to supervise all below activities and risk assess for individual children and the guidance notes below should be followed. If a child has had a traumatic history such as physical abuse, seek advice from a specialist in attachment before trialling these strategies.

### Guidance on Deep Pressure Activities

- Although pressure should be firm – this should not be too firm as to cause any skin or soft tissue damage, and should not cause any redness or bruising. If this happens, stop activity.
- Do not use fingertips as this can provide intense input and cause bruising or tissue damage if too firm. Use palms of hands instead.
- If applying pressure over joints – ensure joints are in a neutral position (not bent or in an uncomfortable or awkward position). Seek advice from an occupational therapist (OT) if you are unsure. Do not apply deep pressure to any painful, inflamed or broken joints or skin.
- Always ensure children can get themselves out of situations – do not pile on pillows where children cannot get themselves free.
- Do not cover children's heads or faces with cushions or blankets
- Always closely supervise children during the below strategies. Any unsupervised activity is down to individual parents or staff's discretion.
- As a guide, bear hug vests or Squease hoodies work on the nervous system for about 20 minutes at a time. After this, the impact on the nervous system is lessened. Children can wear these for longer if it benefits them but are not to be worn for hours at a time.

### Guidance on Weighted Activities

- No strategy or equipment should ever be used as restraint.
- As a guide, weighted blankets should be no more than 10% of a child's body weight plus 1lb.
- As a guide, smaller items such as weighted jackets, bags and lap pads should be no more than 5% of the child's body weight.
- Weighted blankets must never cover children's faces in case they cannot breathe, and if wrapped in a blanket a child must be able to independently free themselves.
- Remove any equipment if the child shows any distress towards wearing or using it.
- Weighted blankets should not be left on children overnight due to the risk of suffocating if they cannot independently free themselves. Children can fall asleep with a weighted blanket on, and then this can be replaced with a heavy quilt or blanket.
- Weighted equipment and strategies are designed to be used for short periods of time throughout the day, such as a weighted vest for 20 minutes during play time, or a weighted blanket used for 30 minutes before bedtime. They are not to be used all day or for several hours at a time.

## Passive strategies

It is especially important that these strategies are carried out by a trusted adult and are done with the child's consent.

- Hand hugs – use palms to provide firm input to muscles on arms and legs.
- Roll a gym ball over arms and legs – can count up to 5 and back on each arm and repeat a few times. Make sure children are lying flat and go carefully over joints.
- With OT guidance - Joint compressions.
- Being rolled in a blanket. Further deep pressure can be applied by using a gym ball or hands on arms and legs.
- Lying under a weighted blanket or heavy quilt.
- Have a weighted lap pad when sitting.
- Have a weighted neck wrap on shoulders.
- Being sandwiched in sofa cushions or beanbags.
- Massage – hands, arms, legs
- Compression garments – tight fitting tops and bottoms

## Active Strategies

- Crawling through piles of beanbags, large cushions or sofa cushions
- Crawling through lycra tunnel
- Using a body sock/ dance sack (lycra bag)
- Using a bear hug vest or Squease hoody.
- Using a weighted jacket, weighted belt, etc.
- Wrapping/ rolling self up in a heavy or weighted blanket.
- Carrying a heavy rucksack
- See also 'Movement' handout

## Where to buy equipment from

Often, every day equipment from around the house such as sofa cushions, beanbags, blankets and pillows can be used. Tight clothing, tubigrip and surf rash vests are readily available from a range of shops also. Weighted equipment can be purchased, but, especially for smaller items, dried rice or beans can be used to weight bags or clothing or sewn into a pillow case as a weighted lap pad or long welly socks as a neck wrap. Any home-made equipment needs to be individually tailored to children and is the parent's responsibility to make this safe.

Some sensory companies that can be useful for inspiration are:

- Rompa
- Southpaw UK
- TFH Special needs toys
- Spacekraft
- Cheap disability aids

## Is this helping?

Make sure you try these strategies at various times of day. Keeping a behavior diary could be helpful to see whether activities and times of day make a difference on how your child reacts, and can also help identify triggers for behaviours.

When you introduce new activities, behavior can become more chaotic; however, will usually settle when the activities become more familiar. It is worth trying strategies a few times before deciding they don't work, unless your child shows a strong dislike to something in which case do not persist.

## Contact details

### Children's Therapy Services

Telephone number: 0300 019 2936

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an information prescription or contact:

The Health Information Centre  
Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust  
Longfleet Road  
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BH15 2JB  
Telephone: 0300 019 8003

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**We can supply this information in other formats, in larger print or have it translated for you. Please call the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499 or email [patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk) for advice.**

**If you wish to make any comments or to ask about any research evidence used to write this leaflet, please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499, write to the Patient Experience Team (address above) or email [patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk)**

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