

## Developing Body Awareness

Awareness of one's body comes from sensations from muscles and joints, and touch sensation from skin receptors. Receptors located in the muscles and joints tell the brain when and how the joints are bending, extending or being pulled and compressed. The receptors in the skin help to build up a map of the body. This information enables the brain to build up a picture of where each part of the body is and how it is moving through space without looking.

A child with poor awareness of body parts tends to rely on visual information and may not be able to move properly if they cannot see where their arms and legs are. They may also have difficulty knowing where their body is in relation to objects. They frequently break toys as they do not know how much pressure they are using when putting things together or pulling apart. The child may have poor fine motor control because they cannot actually feel where or how their arm, hand, fingers are moving and do not have the precise information of the tool in the hand. They typically press too hard or too softly with a pencil. A child may appear sloppy, clumsy or have disorganised personal belongings.

### Strategies for helping a child with poor Body Awareness

1. Child rolls on the floor covered with different materials of different textures.
2. Child wears arm bands or ankle bands lined with small weights, or they carry objects in their hands, on the head, or in a rucksack on their back. This practise heightens awareness of the weighted body parts.
3. Tense and relax different muscle groups, the tension should be held for a few seconds, and then the muscles are relaxed. Relaxation should immediately follow every exercise which uses tension. With their eyes closed, the child can concentrate better on the feel of muscular tension without interference from visual inputs.
4. Two children stand back to back. One child pushes the other; the other provides resistance but only to the degree that they can be pushed slowly across the room. Children reverse roles.
5. Repeat the above with hand to hand, head to head, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip.
6. Outline the child's body on a large piece of paper.
7. Child copies body parts as demonstrated by the adult e.g. play Simon says. Start with the large parts e.g. head, shoulders, arms, legs, then go on to small parts e.g. ears, eyes, hands.
8. Child lies relaxed on their back with closed eyes. When the adult names a body part, child moves the named part gently. The adult may say, for example, "right little finger", "toes", and "left leg", "chin".
9. Use body or face puzzles to reinforce the body concept.
10. Finish an incomplete figure of a person.
11. Copy pictures of different characters.
12. Reinforce names of body parts at all opportunities.

13. Play "Simon Says" type games with eyes open and closed.
15. Reinforce awareness of right or left at all opportunities.
16. Ask your child to:
  - show your right/left hand on request
  - touch right/left body part using right/left hand e.g. with your left hand touch your right ear
  - identify objects on right/left placed in front of child and relative to them
  - identify which hand you have object held in, practise next to and facing child
  - play hand clapping games, facing each other matching right/left
  - place stickers on right/left hands
  - play Twister
  - games involving moving up, down, over, under, beside, behind, between for child to place themselves and complete obstacle courses.

## References

Bissell, J; Fisher, J; Owens, C; Polcyn, P: (1988) Sensory Motor Handbook – Guidance for Implementing and Modifying Activities in the Classroom

Torrance, CA: Sensory Integration International

Frostig, MR: (1982) Move, Grow, Learn – Movement Education Activities. Chicago: Follett Publishing Co.

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## Contact details

### **Children's Therapy Services**

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

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