FACT SHEET: BODY AWARENESS

What is body awareness?

Body awareness is about understanding where our bodies are in space, and where and how we move. It involves a combination of the vestibular, tactile, and proprioceptive sensory systems. Understanding the information received from all three of these systems can increase body awareness of where our body starts and ends, and how it fits/moves through the environment.

What is the proprioceptive sensory system?
The unconscious information we receive from our joints and muscles. For example, proprioception helps with being seated in a chair by giving feedback on our position in space.

What is the vestibular sensory system?
The vestibular system contributes to our balance and sense of spatial orientation. It is composed of vestibular receptors in the inner ear and connects to our central nervous system. It is an important system to help develop balance, coordination, and movement.

What is the tactile sensory system?
The tactile system is an external sense and refers to touch.

Signs of Poor Body Awareness in Children

Children who have poor body awareness can have difficulties learning new tasks. Children may look at their body parts often because they are not quite sure where their body part is at a given time unless they look. They may also show signs of:

- Visual monitoring of body during tasks
- Difficulty orientating body and judging distances and space, e.g. attempting to fit body in certain space when space is clearly too small
- Sliding off of classroom chairs
- Using too little or too much force on things
- Clumsiness (move slowly or stiffly)
- Stumbling or falling when moving quickly

Poor proprioception can also occur in the fingers. This can make it difficult to manage fine motor manipulation, such as letter formation or handwriting, buttoning clothing, or picking up a fork and bringing it to the mouth.
**Key Strategies and Classroom Ideas**

Proprioception helps us pick up information when muscles bend and stretch. Therefore, a major part of increasing body awareness occurs when movement is experienced and learned in play.

Interventions to improve body awareness for children or within a whole classroom will be best used through movement breaks or activities which can increase the input of receptors in the brain. Experience of body movement helps children learn.

Body awareness can also be related to language, so incorporating an understanding of direction, distance and location can help. Some examples of activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have children play mirroring activities</td>
<td>Where one child makes movements and another child must copy the exact movements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have children trace letters on each other’s backs with fingers</td>
<td>And have them guess what letter was formed.</td>
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<td>Encourage pencil rolling during sport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have children touch their specific body parts with eyes closed</td>
<td>And use various commands such as “Wave right hand” or “Wiggle toes on left foot.”</td>
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<td>Encourage contact with floor in as many activities as appropriate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage personal space by giving a child a hula-hoop or rope circle</td>
<td>Or similar for personal space and see what movements they can do within the circle.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use a balloon and instruct children to keep it off the ground</td>
<td>By using various body parts such as hand, elbow, shoulder, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have children brush body with paintbrush before new tasks</td>
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More information can be found at the following websites: