

# Sensory Questionnaire

## Sense of Body Awareness

Greater Glasgow and Clyde



This series of Sensory Questionnaires are designed to enable you to support your child's progress at particular stages of sensory development.

### **YOUR SENSE OF BODY AWARENESS**

Your sense of body awareness is also known as your **PROPRIOCEPTIVE** sense. It is proprioception that tells your body how your limbs are moving and how much force to use when lifting, squeezing or pushing things. If your sense of body awareness isn't well developed you can appear quite clumsy.

We are constantly receiving and processing information from not only the world around us but also from inside our bodies. It is our sense of proprioception (or body awareness) that tells us how our limbs are moving (and where they are if they are not moving!), whether they are stretching or bending, and how much force to use if we are lifting or throwing. It is your sense of body awareness that lets you know where your legs and feet are for example, when they are tucked under the table and you can't see them.

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# Question 1 - Body Awareness (5 - 12 Years)

## Question 1

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**Is your child clumsy, do they bump into people and objects, or fall and trip easily?**

*Does your child seem oblivious to the position of other people and things? Do they bump into furniture or door frames, even in well-known surroundings? Whilst this can be about how your child is processing vision, it can also be because their body awareness isn't fully developed.*



### Strategies and Suggestions

Try the following strategies to help your child become more aware of themselves and their own personal space:

- Try wearing tight fitting clothes or weighted garments. This provides your child with additional feedback to their proprioceptive system (sense of body awareness) and enables them to judge spaces better.
- Have fun in the back garden by building an obstacle course that challenges them to go under, over and round toys. If you have a big enough space indoors do the same thing, but use pillows and duvets to create different obstacles.
- If they struggle to keep to their own space in class use electrical tape to mark out their part of the desk and support them to remain within their designated space.
- Spend time with your child participating in activities such as trampolining and swimming. Both give extra feedback to your proprioceptive sensory system by providing resistance to the limbs.
- When you are out and about, allow your child to walk close beside you or even hold your hand, to enable them to safely negotiate obstacles in the environment such as kerbs and lamp posts.





## Question 2 - Body Awareness (5 - 12 Years)

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**Does your child spill contents when opening containers or spills juice/milk when trying to prepare and pour a drink?**

*Although this can also be much about vision as it is about body awareness, if your child is not getting the sensory feedback from their arms about how much force to use to lift and pour the bottle or jug, they are likely to spill and make a mess.*



### Strategies and Suggestions

Children can sometimes be more accurate with their lifting and pouring when supported with a variety of tactics, which use more than one sensory system. For example combining vision, touch and body awareness (proprioceptive) input by putting a lightly weighted wrist band around your child's wrist. The extra feedback might be enough to make a difference.



Practice the task in a place where it doesn't matter if they make a mess initially; trying to pour and measure water in the bath or in the back garden for example.





## Question 4 - Body Awareness (5 - 12 Years)

### Question 3

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**Does your child tend to use more force than is required and frequently break toys, or uses too much force and unintentionally hurts others?**

*Children who are unable to judge force properly can appear very 'heavy handed' and are often described as being rough with others. You often observe that type of behaviour in toddlers when they go to hug another infant and their mums are rushing in to prevent them from squeezing the living daylights out of them. It is not intentional, it is simply that they cannot judge force properly.*



### Strategies and Suggestions

Try different activities to help your child become more aware of how much force to use:

- Bouncing on a trampoline is a good way of providing extra proprioceptive input.
- Practice ball games together; throwing is easier than catching so start with throwing games. Draw a target on the garden wall or on a pavement with chalk. Vary the distance your child stands away from the target so they learn to use different amounts of force. Once your child is confident with throwing, start to introduce catching games such as throwing a tennis ball at the wall and catching it after it rebounds.
- Playing at 'wheelbarrows' is good for developing upper limb strength, which in turn helps with awareness of force and pressure. If you are not strong enough to hold your child's legs then get them to 'walk' with their hands over a therapy ball.





## Question 4 - Body Awareness (5 - 12 Years)

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#### Does your child love rough and tumble play?

*Often children enjoy rough and tumble play and it is a good way of developing body awareness (proprioceptive) skills. You need to supervise your child to ensure that they are getting the experiences they are seeking without hurting others unintentionally.*



#### Strategies and Suggestions

- Play 'hot dogs'; roll your child up in a duvet or bath towel and using firm pressure squeeze them all over whilst pretending to apply tomato sauce and mustard. Avoid playing this immediately after meal times to reduce the risk of squeezing out dinner!!
- Get your child to help with 'heavy' housework tasks such as pulling wet washing out the machine, hanging it out, vacuuming a room and carrying in shopping. Try using a reward chart as an incentive to get them to help.



- Set up a tug of war game; if you have no older siblings who can play this with your child, tie a rope to a solid (and immovable) object and get them to try to pull it along.



## Question 5 - Body Awareness (5 - 12 Years)

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**Does your child have a weak grip? Do they hold objects like pencils or cutlery so loosely that it is difficult to use the object? Or do they frequently drop objects?**

*Sometimes children are not able to judge how much pressure or force to use to enable them to work implements such as cutlery or pens and pencils effectively. If your child does not use enough pressure when they write for example, their work may be difficult to read, or if they cannot press hard enough with a knife then cutting up food may be a struggle for them.*



### Strategies and Suggestions

- Try using a weighted cuff when your child is practicing writing tasks. The additional proprioceptive (body awareness) feedback can help them write using a bit more pressure.
- Place a foam mat under a sheet of paper when practicing writing tasks; the different sensation may encourage them to press harder.
- Make sausages out of playdoh and encourage your child to practice cutting them up. Look under the 'eating meals' section ([www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/life-skills/self-care/eating-meals](http://www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/life-skills/self-care/eating-meals)) for further suggestions to help your child develop better cutlery skills.
- Try baking cakes at home (a packet mix will do). Instead of using a mixer let your child mix the ingredients with a wooden spoon to improve wrist and arm strength.





## Question 6 - Body Awareness (5 - 12 Years)

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**Does your child chew on toys, clothes and other objects more than other children their age?**

*Mouthing is a very common way for young children to explore new things. Most babies will take objects to their mouths and suck or chew. This will gradually decrease as your child grows. We receive lots of body awareness (proprioceptive) feedback through our mouths. This can be very calming, hence the reason so many young children suck their thumbs or refuse to be parted from their dummy! Even as adults we often put our fingers to our mouths to bite our nails or pick at our lips, normally without even realising what we are doing.*



### Strategies and Suggestions

Some children take this need for mouthing a stage further and will chew on their pencils, collar or cuffs. Try and provide other more appropriate sensory input to prevent them chewing on less 'savory' items!

- It is possible to buy plastic pencil toppers that are designed to be chewed. This is preferable to chewing on paint, wood and lead!
- Providing water in a sports bottle can help, as your child can have something in their mouth without it being obvious.
- Some companies produce 'chewelry'. This is a range of chewable pendants, necklaces and bracelets designed especially for children and young people to put in their mouths safely.







## Question 7 - Body Awareness (5 - 12 Years)

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#### Does your child use their pencil with such force it makes writing difficult?

*Some children press their pencils with such force when writing that they are constantly having to sharpen their pencils because they keep breaking the lead. They press so hard that you can actually read what they have written through several pages of their jotters. Whilst this may seem unimportant when your child is in early primary school, the further up the school they go the more writing they will be expected to produce, and the more tired their hands will become. Try the following strategies to help them use less pencil pressure:*



#### Strategies and Suggestions

- Try using an angled board and large soft pencil grip to help with finger, hand and wrist position.
- If you can find a stockist of old fashioned carbon paper try creating a paper 'sandwich' by alternating sheets of writing paper with carbon paper, then ask your child to write a sentence on the top sheet without pressing so hard that the writing will be read through the layers below. Repeat this activity on a daily basis until your child learns to press less.
- Do some hand 'warm up' exercises before completing any writing exercise. This could include wiggling fingers and shaking wrists, placing hands palm to palm and pressing together (visit [www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/resources/ot-activityinformation-sheets/hand-warm-up-exercises](http://www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/resources/ot-activityinformation-sheets/hand-warm-up-exercises) for further ideas). This could be done as a whole class activity or with an individual child.





## Question 8 - Body Awareness (5 - 12 Years)

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#### Does your child walk on their tip toes?

*Walking on tip toes intermittently is a common behaviour displayed by lots of children and is a typical stage of child development. If however your child is a perpetual tiptoe walker this is a different issue as prolonged and sustained toe walking can cause your child's Achilles tendons to shorten.*



#### Strategies and Suggestions

If your child constantly tip-toes try the following strategies to get your child to walk with their feet flat on the floor:

- Use good ankle supporting footwear such as walking boots or 'hi-top' style trainers; the extra weight and support can sometimes be enough to reinforce a better walking position.
- Some parents have reported that letting their children wear 'clogs' over the summer can reduce tiptoe walking as it is almost impossible to maintain a tiptoe position whilst keeping the shoes on their feet.
- It is possible to purchase or even make weighted ankle cuffs which will provide your child with additional proprioceptive feedback, and may reduce their need to tiptoe.
- Allow your child to jump on a trampoline regularly.
- Try stretching exercises to maintain your child's tendon lengths. Get them to stand on a step (facing up the steps) with their heels hanging over the edge.
- Carry out some gentle stretching exercises 2-3 times daily when you sit in front of your child and support their ankle with one hand whilst pressing on the ball of their sole with the palm of your other hand.
- Gently and consistently remind them to walk with their feet flat on the floor.

