THE CLUMSY CHILD

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Have you ever noticed your child walking and falling over his or her own feet, walking into furniture, being unable to throw a ball over a distance or struggling to maintain his or her balance and wondered why this is happening?

To shed some light on this, let’s look at the picture above and use the little man as an example for such a child. With the parachute representing all the aspects that need to be in place in order for the parachute to function perfectly so that the little man will be able to move freely, we’ll look at Spatial Orientation, Proprioception and the Vestibular System as some of the factors that may influence a child’s clumsiness.
Spatial Orientation

Spatial orientation is the functional ability to move the body or body parts in a designated spatial area.

Without all the aspects, the child will struggle to perform certain tasks as he needs all the elements in place to function well in a normal environment. Let’s take the red colour in the parachute to represent Spatial Orientation. If a child’s spatial orientation is not in place it has an influence on the child’s life.

- **Signs of Spatial Orientation Problems**
  
  Children may write or colour over the lines instead of within the lines. They might not know where to start writing on a page while class instructions are given; they might start writing in the middle of the paper or at the end of the paper. When they do start writing they tend to write from big to small or even from small to big. When they look at certain forms or objects they will get distracted or find it very difficult to identify them. They struggle to concentrate and to read the time effectively. They tend to get confused between letters such as b and d and numbers such as 6 and 9. Children that have problems with spatial orientation will find the concepts forwards, backwards, under and up very difficult.

There can also be other reasons for your child being clumsy such as their proprioceptive system not functioning correctly or their vestibular system having problems.

Proprioception

Proprioception applies to the actual awareness of sensations that come from receptors in the muscles, joints, skin, tendons, and underlying tissue.

- **Signs of Proprioception system problems:**
  
  Children might experience poor body awareness, poor awareness of pressure and poor motor planning. This leads to children having trouble judging the force needed to throw balls or bounce on a mini trampoline. They will, therefore, have problems with gross motor skills such as running or jumping and will have no left and right awareness. They may come across as children who fall often and have more problems and accidents than other children of their age. These children may tend to run into furniture, walls, or other people often because they don’t know when to stop or how to control their body. They will prefer to play with younger children rather than with children of the same age. They will walk too hard, push too hard, bang too hard, write too hard, play with objects with too much force, etc.
Looking at the picture of the parachute, let’s say that the proprioception system is the purple section. If this section, the proprioceptive system, is not functioning correctly other problems will appear and the “little man” will not be able to function properly. For example he may press too hard or even too soft and this will influence the whole body.

**Vestibular system**
The vestibular system is the sensory mechanism in the inner ear that detects movement of the head and helps to control balance.

- **Signs of vestibular problems**
  Children with vestibular problems will tend to get very dizzy, especially with head movements such as turning to look at something. They will struggle to be able to navigate in the dark because they might not know where to walk or when to stop. These children might get motion sickness or headaches with nausea. Children with vestibular problems will try not to partake in spinning activities because they will make them feel uncomfortable which they dislike. They will have poor balance and will struggle with any balance activities that are required of them.

Looking at the picture again, the vestibular system can be seen to be represented by the green sections. Thus it can be seen that the vestibular system needs to be in place in order for the “little man” to function properly.

To understand the vestibular system better we can break it up into two types of Vestibular problems:

1. **Hyper-vestibular problems/oversensitivity:**
   This means that there is too much stimulation reaching the Central Nervous System so the child’s system is receiving an overload and is unable to ignore the information. Children who are oversensitive tend to experience coordination, balance and locomotion motor skills problems.

2. **Hypo-vestibular problems/under sensitivity**
   This means that the central nervous system does not receive sufficient information or correctly process information about movement, direction changes and relationships to gravity. These children tend to need more stimulation in order to function properly. Under sensitive children tend to be those who like to spin and swing because they are seeking movement. However, they tend to have poor motor skills in laterality and directionality.
WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP MY CHILD?
Mind Moves® is a movement programme that parents and teachers can utilise on a daily basis to assist children to reach their full potential and also to focus on the areas that need attention. The following Mind Moves (De Jager: 2009) can be done in a controlled manner, 3 times per day, if possible.

### Antennae adjuster
Massage both ear lobes simultaneously from top to bottom using circular movements. This move develops the near senses, auditory processing, auditory perception as well as receptive language ability.

### Mind Moves Massage
Child must stand upright and hold both arms 90 degrees to the side of the body. Stand behind the child and firmly trace the outline of the body from head to toe. Hold the feet and push down for a moment as if planting the legs before repeating three times.

### Rise and shine
Simulate the reflex by flinging the arms wide open while breathing deeply and slowly, and then closing the arms over the chest in a hug, breathing deeply and slowly. The learner can hug himself, or the parent may hug him simultaneously. This move boosts relaxation, rhythmic breathing and a sense of well-being.
Fun Activities:

- Climbing over/under/ left/ right obstacle courses.
- Hammock Swing
- Mini trampoline or mattress jumping
- Rolling
- Medicine ball catch
- Hand strengthening
- Hat-stealing wrestling

You will never have this day with your children again - tomorrow they'll be a little bit older than they are today.

Today is a gift,
breathe & notice, smell & hold them;
study their faces & little feet & pay attention
enjoy today-
it will be over before you know it.
Relish the charms of the present.

References


