

# Outdoor Play: Promoting Sensory Integration

**Sensory input** is the information we take in using our many senses. Infants and toddlers need a **LOT** of unrestrictive, active outdoor play in order to activate and integrate their senses.

**The seven basic senses that provide sensory feedback are:**

1. Touch
2. Proprioception
3. Vestibular
4. Sight
5. Listening
6. Smell
7. Taste

**Proprioception** is comprised of **sensory receptors** in the **joints, muscles, ligaments, tendons, and connective tissues** that tell you where your body parts are without having to look at them.

The **vestibular sense** tells us **where our bodies are in space** – where we are in reference to our surroundings. It is known as our balance sense and works in partnership with gravity.

The more exposure a young child has to sensory experiences, the more organized and integrated the brain, sensory system, emotions, and body become. Children need opportunities for their bodies to be physically challenged through unrestrictive outdoor play. They need many different experiences including crawling, walking, running, sliding, swinging, dancing, spinning, rolling, digging, lifting, and other active movements.

**To INTEGRATE the senses, it is VERY IMPORTANT to provide children with a variety of sensory experiences on a regular basis, including LOTS of time to actively PLAY OUTDOORS.**

**Sensory integration** means that **all stimuli** detected by the senses becomes **organized** for functional use.

Resource: **Balanced and Barefoot: How Unrestricted Outdoor Play Makes for Strong, Confident, and Capable Children**  
by Angela J. Hanscom



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