



Best Practice Guidelines for the Use of Weighted, Proprioceptive and other Sensory Equipment

Occupational Therapists and Physical Therapists with SD23 Inclusive Education Services sometimes recommend the use of specialized equipment for specific students within our District. The risk status of each student is considered prior to the use of any sensory equipment. This equipment is prescribed on an **individual basis after clinical observation and assessment** and training is provided to staff working with that student.

Sensory tools and strategies are being increasingly used to promote students' self-regulation, behavior and participation in school. Staff and parents often have questions surrounding the use of such equipment, particularly weighted equipment such as weighted vests, lap weights, and weighted blankets, and deep pressure equipment including deep pressure vests, mini-trampolines and exercise/therapy balls.

Equipment must be used based on need and any weighted equipment must be the appropriate size and weight in relation to the child. Injury or even death can occur if a weighted blanket is too heavy or an item is used incorrectly. Although the equipment may prove effective for one student, it is not necessarily the best piece of equipment for another student. In some cases, the use of sensory equipment may be contra-indicated if the student has a particular physical condition. Just like medications, specialized equipment should not be shared among students unless discussed and supported by the SD23 Occupational Therapist or Physical Therapist.

Some schools are purchasing equipment that can be considered weighted, proprioceptive or sensory items. This equipment should only be allocated by someone who is familiar with the potential neurological, musculoskeletal, and behavioral impacts (positive and negative) of such equipment.

Guidelines for Occupational Therapists regarding the use of weighted covers were published in 2008 in response to recommendations made by Quebec Coroner Catherine Rudel-Tessier following her investigation into the tragic death of a nine-year-old student who died of suffocation under a weighted cover he had been rolled in by his teacher, at the special school he attended.

The Ordre des ergothérapeutes du Québec (OEQ) published a position statement to assist Occupational Therapists, with guidelines to follow for the safe use of weighted covers as part of an occupational therapy treatment plan. The Occupational Therapist must assess the student's need for the cover, and if determined appropriate, provide a weighted cover with the correct size and weight for the student, and train caregivers and professionals in its appropriate and safe use.

For student safety, we recommend that you consult with your school's Occupational Therapist or Physical Therapist prior to the purchase or use of any weighted, proprioceptive or specialized sensory equipment.