

Guidelines for the Use of Weighted Blankets

This handout was created by a working group of occupational therapists at B.C. Children's Hospital using the available best evidence, as of the date indicated in the footer, and is intended to provide guidelines and safety precautions for families using weighted blankets. Families should seek advice from an occupational therapist before using a weighted blanket, as this information sheet is **not a recommendation or intended to replace an assessment**.

What is a weighted blanket?

Weighted blankets are blankets with beads sewn into them for weight. If used safely (*please see next page*), these blankets can help children calm down and focus. They offer a firm, yet gentle squeeze (a deep pressure touch) and can create the feeling of being hugged, held, or cuddled when an appropriate weight is used. Weighted blankets come in a variety of weights and sizes.



Image courtesy of: <https://funandfunction.com/soft-plush-weighted-blanket.html>

When can weighted blankets be used?

Whenever a child is using a weighted blanket, they should be supervised by an adult. During the day, a weighted blanket may be used:

- When a child is engaged in quiet activities, such as reading, colouring, playing, or taking a break to calm down
- As part of a calm down routine
- During a bedtime routine, such as story time.

Weighted blankets should not be used overnight with a child.

What is a safe weight? ✓

The weight of the blanket should not be more than 10% of the child's weight. For example, a child who weighs 40lbs should not use a blanket exceeding 4lbs; a child who weighs 90lbs should not use a blanket exceeding 9lbs.



Weighted blanket tutorial. ©Kelly. CC-BY-SA 2.0

How long should it be used?

The blanket should not be used for more than 20 minutes (unless there are exceptional reasons and they have been discussed with a professional).



Safety Considerations

- **Never** use a weighted blanket as a restraint.
- **Never** cover a child's head and neck.
- Head and neck should always be clearly visible.
- The child must be supervised at all times during use.
- Do not roll a child in the blanket. Place it over top of them, with head and neck visible.
- The child must be able to remove or get free by themselves.
- Remind the child that they can take it off if it feels too hot or heavy.
- The blanket should NOT drape over the sides of a bed, as this makes it difficult to remove.
- **Never** use a weighted blanket in a crib or bassinet, or with an infant.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions and safety recommendations.



Who should NOT use a weighted blanket?

A weighted blanket can be potentially harmful for a child with health problems, such as:

- Breathing or respiratory issues
- Heart or circulation issues
- Joint or muscle pain
- Epilepsy
- Extremely poor muscle tone
- Skin issues, including allergies
- Children under 5 years old unless prescribed by a health professional

For best results, consult with an occupational therapist or other health care professional.

What should I look for when a child is using a weighted blanket?

Watch for any negative signs from the child while they are under the blanket, such as:

- Nausea
- Difficulty breathing
- Skin irritation
- Increase in temperature
- Changes in skin tone (e.g., flushed, pale)
- Pain or discomfort
- Any behavioural or physical reactions indicating discomfort or anxiety



What is the research?

Currently, there is little research on the use of weighted blankets in children. One systematic review of moderate quality provided insufficient evidence as to whether weighted blankets help with sleep or reduce anxiety. As a result, the effectiveness of weighted blankets for each child may vary and should be evaluated and monitored such as through use of a tracking tool. Please see next pages.

Reference:

Eron, K., Kohnert, L., Watters, A., Logan, C., Weisner-Rose, M., & Mehler, P. S. (2020). Weighted Blanket Use: A Systematic Review. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(2), 7402205010p1-7402205010p14.

SENSORY EQUIPMENT/TOOL TRACKING SHEET

Child: _____

Place of Use: _____

Completed by: _____

Type of Equipment/Tool: _____

Phase1: Without Use of Sensory Equipment/Tool

Instructions: Please complete this data sheet for 10 days without the sensory equipment/tool and then 10 days with equipment/tool. It is recommended that the same individual record the observations during the same time and/or activity each day.

Note: Please see next page re ***Behavior** and ****Level of Participation**

Date	Time	Alertness/calmness	*Behavior:	**Describe the Level of Participation Compared to Others
<i>Example: April 29, 2021</i>	<i>10:00 – 10:20</i>	<i>Restless and agitated</i>	<i>Sitting and participating during circle time</i>	<i>Very Limited: During circle time observed some rolling on the floor and fidgeting with others' shoelaces. Got up 4 times and asked to go get a drink of water each time.</i>

Adapted from Sunny Hill Health Centre by Occupational Therapy, BC Children's (April, 2021)



SENSORY EQUIPMENT/TOOL TRACKING SHEET

Phase 2: With Sensory Equipment – circle one

(Weighted vest, Lap pad, Compression clothing, Inflatable cushion, Therapy ball, Weighted blanket, Other: _____)

Date	Time	Alertness/calmness	*Behavior:	**Describe the Level of Participation Compared to Others
<i>Example: May 18, 2021</i>	<i>10:00- 10:20</i>	<i>Alert and calm</i>	<i>Sat and followed instructions.</i>	<i>Engaged/Appropriate: During circle time observed to remain seated and follow instructions. Did request to leave to get a drink of water once towards the end of the activity.</i>

***Behavior:** Please customize to match desired child-specific outcome(s).

- ****Level of Participation compared to others:**
- Engaged/Appropriate
 - Somewhat limited
 - Very limited
 - Unable

