

WEIGHT & COMPRESSION TECHNIQUE – DPS

- **Weight & Compression Technique**

Weight and or gentle compression act like a hug, this is a technique called deep pressure stimulation (DPS) to help a person feel more secure. This is a deep touch pressure applied to the body – by hands, tools, or blankets – that can relax the nervous system.

<https://www.appliedbehavioranalysisedu.org/what-is-deep-pressure-stimulation/>

‘Deep Pressure Stimulation (DPS) is firm but gentle squeezing, hugs, or holding that relaxes the nervous system. This pressure can be applied with the hands, special massage tools, or products that your child can wear or wrap around themselves to provide pressure. Done properly, this therapy triggers a chain reaction in the body that releases an overall sense of calm and peace.

Dr. Rachel Dew,
DNM, PhD

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The *sympathetic nervous system* (SNS) is the “alert” system in the body. This is the one in charge when you’re facing a stressful situation at work, driving through heavy traffic in a storm, or when you receive an unexpected bill in the mail. When the SNS takes the lead for too long, you feel anxious, tired, on edge, and irritable. You don’t sleep as well, and your digestive system might act up.

When you apply deep pressure to the body, the body switches from running its *sympathetic nervous system* to its *parasympathetic nervous system*. This is the so-called switch from “fight or flight” to “rest and digest”. Unfortunately, kids with autism spectrum and sensory processing disorders spend a lot of time with the sympathetic nervous system stuck in the on position. Even when they do calm down, it takes very little to retrigger this system.

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As deep pressure is applied to the body, the parasympathetic nervous system comes online, calming your child and bringing a sense of well-being. In tandem with this change comes a release of dopamine and serotonin, the feel-good neurotransmitters of the brain. These hormones help with motivation, impulse control, attention, memory, positive social behavior, sleep, and digestion.'

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Deep pressure stimulation (DPS) can be performed on a client by an integrative somatic practitioner as well as a client can practice it at home on their own.

At home

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The simplest way an individual can perform DPS is by using a weighted blanket. It can be used for shorter periods of time to ground and calm, while some people find it helpful to sleep with a weighted blanket.

Things to be mindful of when sleeping with a weighted blanket:

- It can take time for the body to get used to it
- The body can become dependent on it
- Hard to bring one with you during travel
- Not recommended for people with sleep apnea & other sleep or respiratory diseases
- Not recommended for young children and infants

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At Home with Props

An individual can also practice DPS at home on their own by laying on a towel or yoga mat (or their bed if they prefer) and covering their body with a blanket and tucking it in and under them around their body from the neck down to create a secure light compression and then by stacking pillows on their chest, belly, and legs. Then drawing their arms back inside of the blanket, closing the eyes and spending 10–30 minutes relaxing.

In a session

In a session DPS can be done with the use of weighted blankets during a session either in-person or even virtually if the client has a weighted blanket at home or by manually or verbally guiding the client through DPS using commonly found props and items at home.

If you are verbally guiding your client in a virtual session, you can use the instructions from the At Home with Props section above.

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If you are conducting an in-person session here is the process:

Props:

10-15-pound weighted blanket

2 yoga bolsters

Yoga mat

1 long pillow (very soft)

2 regular pillows

2 blankets (yoga blankets/Mexican blankets are ideal and easy to fold)

Eye pillow

Essential oil (if the client wants to use and has smelled a sample and finds the scent relaxing)

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Below are the steps to conducting DPS – be sure to ask your client at the end of each step if they are comfortable in the following way:

‘How is that? Are you comfortable? Do you feel that is too much or not enough pressure or is it good?’

Step One:

Roll out the yoga mat on the floor and invite your client to lay down. If moving on and off the floor is not accessible to them, you can also do this on a sofa (it is not recommended to work with a client in their bed or your bed – see boundaries and guidelines later within this curriculum for further detail). Have your client lay flat and place one regular pillow under their knees (this relieves pressure on the lower back). Place a pillow under their head. Have them place their arms down at their sides on the ground close to their body and close their eyes if that feels safe. If closing their eyes does not feel safe, invite them to keep them open and forego the use of the eye mask in step 4.

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Step Two:

Gently lay the weighted over their entire body (up to the neck and down past the feet). Tuck the blanket under them around their body and feet.

Step Three:

Next, take the 2 blankets (yoga blankets/Mexican blankets) and fold them 3 times so that they make a rectangle about two feet deep and three feet wide. Gently lay one across the client's chest and one across the belly.

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Step Four:

Next, take the 2 yoga bolsters and gently lay one long ways (vertical) across the client's torso and one across the legs. Finally, place the 1 long pillow (very soft) on top of the client's torso. Finally, place the eye pillow over their eyes.

If the client had pre-agreed to the use of essential oils, place 2-3 drops of the oil into the palm of your hands, gently rub them together and then hold your hands about 4-5 inches above the client's face with palms facing down and fingers out straight. Ask the client to take a few deep breaths through their nose.

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Step Five:

IF the client would like a small amount of additional weight/pressure and they have verbally confirmed this with you (and you have informed consent to touch – see boundaries and guidelines for more on this), place one hand parallel across the upper chest/clavicle area (not the neck). Your whole hand is parallel to their waist – fingers pointing towards their shoulder. The other hand will be placed either on the belly or mid-thighs (ask the client of their preference). Again, the hand is placed parallel. Take a deep inhale, ask your client to do the same. On both of your exhales, gently press down – it is a tiny weight change, no leaning or pushing should take place. This is a minor pressure change only.

Take two full breath cycles and then gently lean backwards and release the pressure in slowest of slow motion. Allow the client to rest in this position for 10-30 minutes if that is accessible to them. To come out of the position, slowly remove the layers, have them stretch and yawn, roll gently to their left side and stay on the side for 2-4 breaths. Slowly blink the eyes open and roll up to a seated position slowly.

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