

Introducing and Using the Weighted Lap Buddies

In this mini guide, Sarah Brown, an experienced Early Years teacher and leader, explores the positives and 'how to' for introducing and using Weighted Lap Buddies.



About the Writer... Sarah Brown is an experienced Early Years teacher and leader with expertise in inclusive practice, SEND, communication and language development, and evidence-informed teaching across Nursery, Reception and KS1 settings in London and Manchester.

She is passionate about creating communication-rich, inclusive environments where all children can thrive, particularly those with SEND, EAL and speech and language needs. Her work focuses on high-quality interactions, early language development, self-regulation and practical strategies that support children, families and educators.

Sarah is also the founder of [@thedyslexicleader](https://www.thedyslexicleader.com), a professional platform where she shares accessible ideas, book recommendations and inclusive teaching approaches with educators and families. She regularly contributes to wider professional conversations through webinars, podcasts and speaking engagements, including presenting at the Nursery World Big Day Out 2026.

Positives for using Weighted Lap Buddies

Positive: Children are able to concentrate on their learning.

How? The Weighted Lap Buddies support children's sensory regulation by providing a light amount of weight to child's lap. This weight is supporting proprioception senses and providing 'work' for the body to focus on. Simply meaning the body is having to work and focus on something providing feedback to the brain to aid concentration. This can reduce anxiety, stress and dysregulation for children. The proprioception part of the brain is responsible for organisation, structure and emotional regulation. Deep Pressure Touch (DPT) supports the parasympathetic nervous system (also known as rest and digest) it helps to reduce arousal after stress and enables children to feel calmer and safer (as mentioned by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists).

Why not a weighted blanket? Often weighted blankets are used for children, however these should be specifically weighed to each child and if too heavy or too light can feel uncomfortable and claustrophobic for children causing more distraction or distress. Having a smaller item which can be used such as just the animal or lap pad and buddy means the weight placed on the child's lap can be changed, is distributed evenly and is more appropriate for the child's age. With regular observation you may find that the child is responsive to just one element of the weight and for others you may notice they need both. At different points of the child's journey, you may notice that they need more or less weight due to circumstances, it's important to respond to these changes quickly to support children to continue to feel comfortable.

Positive: Providing a tactile, sensory element to learning can help create further learning pathways for children whilst aiding concentration.

How? Providing children with different sensory elements whilst learning is important to support their concentration and to help develop neurological pathways for knowledge. The Weighted Lap Buddies have a soft feel to them which can give a calming feeling to the person when touched. Stroking something soft triggers the hormones oxytocin and dopamine, our 'happy' hormones, creating a sense of happiness, feelings of safety and trust. This reduces our cortisol levels (fight or flight mode) and helps the nervous system to reset. Some of the weighted lap buddies such as the Guinea Pig, Cat and Kangaroo vibrate, giving them another sensory element.

Why not just any textures? Engaging different body senses whilst learning helps to stimulating diverse areas of the brain, creating stronger, cross-referenced neural pathways which, in turn, create further pathways for learning and embedding skills. By providing a Weighted Lap Buddy the two sensory elements of texture (think stroking and patting, and on buddies such as the kangaroo, different material textures) and the light weight helps the body to concentrate and for children who may have that need to move it provides grounding.

Positive: Two in one. Each lap buddy (apart from the Kangaroo) comes with its own weighted lap pad which can be used with the buddy or on its own.

How? It's important to monitor how children respond to the lap pad, lap buddy and both when using them. For some children, just the lighter weight of the lap pad will be enough to support regulation, whilst others may need both the buddy and lap pad, or just the buddy to provide the sensory feedback they need to regulate. By using the lap buddy separately to the lap pad you can use them with multiple children who may need different weights for regulation. Deep Pressure Touch (DPT) can help children to regulate their emotions and recover more quickly after becoming upset because it provides the brain with strong sensory information which supports organising. It reduces the feeling of overload and supports the brain to use different parts of itself to calm and regulate the body providing calm and regulation.

Why? Children should have their needs met regardless of where they are working. This means that children should engage with the same sensory support that they get when working on the carpet, working at tables or to regulate themselves with the support. This means that you can use the buddy for one child who may need more weight to help them concentrate and focus. You can then use the lap pad for a child who needs sensory input but less the weight of the animal. The lap pads can also be taken from the carpet to working at tables. This means children working at tables who may swing on chairs or needs sensory input whilst completing work can also benefit from the lap pad.

Positive: The weighted lap buddies provide children with a feeling of responsibility and purpose at home or in a setting.

How? Children can have the lap buddy as a pet, making sure it's kept safe, put to bed when finished with and if needed taking it for walks (to different parts of the school or setting). Giving children a sense of responsibility can help make routines predictable and give a sense of security to anxious children. Using Deep Pressure Touch (DPT) can help children to feel calmer and less anxious by giving the body the chance to move from fight, flight or freeze into a calmer physiological state. This includes slowing the heart rate down, slowing breathing down and relaxing muscles. All this helps children to feel safe and secure in their bodies and in the settings around them.

Why? Providing an opportunity for children to take charge, lead or have responsibility for something can often decrease anxiety and stressors. It can give the child ownership and control of the activity. This not only helps with distracting the child from the anxiety and stress they might be feeling but also supports them to self-regulate by focusing on something else. It gives them a sense and feeling of belonging and purpose, as well as increasing self-esteem and self-confidence.

Ways to use the Lap Buddies

Way to use	How	Benefits
Carpet Time Buddy	Place the lap buddy on their lap during the teaching session. Particularly useful during assembly, carpet times and phonics.	• Provides calming proprioceptive input whilst listening • Reduces fidgeting without distracting others • Supports listening and attention • Helps reduce anxiety about speaking aloud
Reading buddies	Children cuddle or rest the buddy on their lap whilst reading. Particularly useful for calm reading, focus and enjoying reading times.	• Provides support for children who might find reading anxious • Reduces need for movement • Encourage positive relationship with reading • Support for children
Independent writing	Children place lap buddy on their lap and can stroke or hold it whilst sitting. Particularly useful for helping children to focus and reduce anxiety around writing.	• Provides support for children who might struggle with writing • Helps to provide deep pressure in the legs supporting organising in the brain
Roleplay a vet's	Create a vet's role play and provide the buddies to be poorly animals that the children can look after and care for.	• Provides opportunities to look after pets and share how to care for living things • Gives children opportunities to play and use their imagination
Class pet or mascot	Use the buddies to be a class pet, assign children to look after it and keep it safe. You could create a list of things that the pet needs or wants and provide this to the child to help keep them busy and focused on the task such as taking the pet for a walk, putting it to bed.	• Gives children's a sense of accomplishment • Provides opportunities for belonging and structure

Regulation or Calm Down area	Provide an area of the classroom as a calming space for children to use to regulate and calm down. Use the lap buddies alongside other resources to support calming down, such as breathing cards or boards, sensory toys, emotional cards or feeling scales.	• Offers children autonomy over their ways to regulate and calm down • Provides Deep Pressure Touch for regulation
Calm starts to the morning	Provide the buddies alongside morning activities such as fine motor skills and handwriting practice.	• Offers children the chance to regulate at an activity • Supports transition from home into school more calmly
Transition Support	Allow children to hold or rest the lap buddy on them during times of transition such as coming in from playtime, lunch time, moving to and from assembly, waiting for parents at home time, etc.	• Offers children consistency and comfort during times of change • Provides Deep Pressure Therapy for regulation

It's important that children are provided with multiple opportunities to regulate and given a choice on what resource or support they would like to use to regulate. Using lap buddies proactively and before children become dysregulated is integral to support children's development and supports children to stay in their 'window of regulation' a place where children are able be regulated and stay regulated.

You could use the lap buddies alongside other strategies and tools such as beathing boards, now and next boards and visual timers.

With many thanks to Sarah Brown for writing this content.