

# TACTILE – OVER-RESPONSIVE



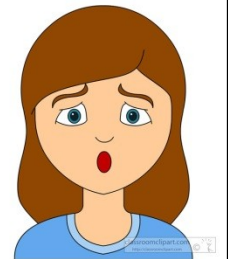
The tactile system tells us about what we touch. It gives us information about our bodies and what the environment around us is like. Touch receptors in our skin give us information about the different types of textures and temperatures we feel.

Our tactile system has both a protective and a learning function. The protective function alerts us to pain/heat/danger and therefore allows us to quickly move away from danger.



We also learn from touch, we explore items by touching and feeling – this function develops later and begins to override the protective functions once we learn what is safe to touch.

Children who don't like touch or items that feel 'different' may be **over-responsive** to tactile stimulation. Their protective function will not allow them to explore and they therefore struggle to learn. A strong reaction (fear, sweating, pupil dilation, going pale) may mean your child is panicking, and they want to run away from the touch.



A lot of children who are over-responsive to tactile stimulation find wet textures (e.g. paint, yoghurt) particularly difficult, so start with dry items (e.g. uncooked pasta, velcro) when trying to get your child to touch something new.



When children are over-responsive to touch, forcing them to touch something they don't like will increase their stress, and make it more likely they will refuse to try again. Introduce games with textures slowly and be guided by your child. Never force them to touch something, and reward progress frequently with something your child particularly likes.

# Tactile (over-responsive) ACTIVITY IDEAS



- Ensure that your child can see you before you touch them so they are not surprised; avoid approaching from behind.

- Be aware of busy places— some children may be scared of touch which will have an impact on going shopping, assemblies, or even sitting next to another child. Allow your child personal space.
- Use a firm pressure if you need to touch your child as this tends to be easier to tolerate than light touch. E.g when drying them after a bath/shower.



- Increase proprioceptive activities throughout the day. Complete a proprioceptive activity before a tactile task to help your child to get into the 'just right' state Then also complete proprioceptive activities afterwards.

- Deep Pressure - Apply deep, even pressure to your child's arms, hands and fingers, slowly and calmly. Always do this in front of your child so they can see you and what you are doing. Use a Deep pressure (Brushing) programme as guided by a therapist.
- Graded messy play – Start with dry, larger items (dry pasta/lentils) before progressing to mixed textures (such as playdoh, pastry) and then finally to smaller, more grainy/lumpy or wet textures. Only move onto the more 'difficult' textures once your child is completely comfortable with the drier ones.



- Allow your child to investigate new textures using a tool – such as a paint brush or stick, or allow them to wear gloves.
- Encourage touch of dry textures such as lentils, sand, or torn paper by hiding their favourite, motivating items for them to find.

- Wearing tight clothing – such as 'Sensory hug vests', or lycra sports clothing. These apply constant pressure to the skin which can have a calming effect. Having tight clothing under other clothes can also prevent loose clothes feeling tickly, or rubbing.

- Electric toothbrush – Some children may be over sensitive to different textures in their mouth and therefore be fussy about what they will eat. Using an electric toothbrush, if tolerated, can help to desensitize the inside of the mouth before eating.

