

## B1 - Occupational therapy tactile strategies

### Sensory play activities to develop tactile integration

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#### **Rub-a-dub-dub in bath play**

Encourage the child to rub a variety of textures against their skin. Offer different kind of soaps (oatmeal soap, fun foam or shaving cream, lotion soap with various scents) and differently textured scrubbers (loofa, sponges, character washcloths, exfoliating gloves, bristle body brushes, nail brushes).

#### **Water play**

Fill the kitchen sink with soapy water and a variety of unbreakable plastic containers and bottles, turkey basters, sponges to squeeze, funnels to pour through and pump action toys. Alternatively, fill a large washtub with water and toys and set it outside on the grass. Pouring and measuring are excellent for developing the tactile system as well as great forms of entertainment.

#### **Finger painting**

If your child enjoys painting, allow them to wallow in this literally sensational activity. Encourage them to stick a finger or two into the paint or gloop, but don't force them if aversive and allow them to watch you and join in when they are ready.

For a different tactile experience, mix sand into the paint. Or instead of commercial paint and paper, place a blob of shaving cream, peanut butter or Tahini paste and encourage them to draw shapes, letters and numbers. If they 'make a mistake' rub it out with their hand and start again.

#### **Finger drawing**

With your finger draw a shape, letter or design on the child's back or hand. Ask the child to guess what it is and to pass the design on to another person.

#### **Sand play**

In a sandbox or on a sand table, add small toys (cars, trucks, people and dinosaurs, etc) which the child can arrange and rearrange, bury and rediscover. Alternatively, use dried beans, rice, pasta, cornmeal, popcorn, soil or mud. Making mud pies and getting messy are therapeutic too.

#### **Feely box**

Cut a hole in the side of a shoebox. Place different object in the box, such as cotton reels, big marbles or a ball, plastic animals and dinosaurs etc. The game is for the child to insert a hand through the hole and guess what toy she is touching-without looking. This activity improves the child's ability to discriminate the form of an object without use of vision.

#### **"Can you find it?"**

Hide small objects in the sandbox or feely box. Ask the child to find a button or car without looking. Or, show them the toy, coin, or block and ask them to find one that matches.

### **“Can you describe it?”**

Provide play objects with different textures, temperatures, and weight. Ask them to tell you about an object they are touching (try and persuade them not to look at it to make the game more challenging). Is the object round? Cool? Smooth? Soft? Heavy? Hard?

### **Oral activities**

Licking stickers and putting them in books, blowing whistles and kazoos, blowing bubbles through wands and straws, drinking through straws or sport bottles, tasting new food and chewing on gums, crunchy Wotsits or ‘Talk Tools’ chewy tubes [www.talktools.net](http://www.talktools.net) may satisfy the child’s need to use their mouth.

### **Ellie Jiggler**

Use vibration tools for heightened oral motor exploration that can be placed around the jawline as well as inside the mouth.

### **Hands-on-cooking**

Put cookie dough, bread dough or pastry on a table top, in a shallow roasting pan (not a high-sided bowl) for the child to mix, press roll and explore.

### **Science activities**

Touching worms and egg yolks, collecting acorns and pine cones, planting seeds, picking seasonal fruits and digging the garden, all provide interesting tactile experiences.

### **Handling pets**

What could be more satisfying than stroking a kitten, brushing a dog or cradling a rabbit?

### **Box play**

Collect boxes in different sizes. The child can stack them like sky scrapers and line them up like houses to make a box city. Nest them, load them with treasures, and rearrange them. Decorate them with stickers, paint them and make a snug place.

### **Swaddling**

Roll the child up tightly in a blanket or duvet. Being wrapped up provides deep pressure and is usually pleasurable. The child with tactile dysfunction will often roll himself up in a blanket as a form of self-therapy, but it is special treat to have a trusted grown-up do the rolling. **Never leave the child unattended when rolled up to prevent suffocation.** Alternatively create a safe corner with lots of pillows or beanbags to ‘crash’ and roll or dive into.

### **People sandwich**

Have the child play the part of a slice of ‘salami’ or ‘cheese’, spread them with pretend mustard, mayonnaise, relish, ketchup, etc using a sponge or any type of brush using firm, downwards strokes (avoid the tummy and face). Place the child between two pillows or beanbags to represent the slice of bread and press firmly up and down the mat to squish out the excess mustard, so the child feels deep, soothing pressure.

### **Back rubs**

Apply deep, firm pressure to your child’s back and limbs. Rub down and up and side-to-side.

**Dress-up**

Prepare a special carton just for dress up. Include hats, shoes, gloves, furry or feathery boas and silk scarves, socks, etc.

**Secret hideaway**

Supply towels, blankets, sheets, sleeping bags, down comforters, pillows, for a fort or hideaway under the table.