

Increasing Tolerance For Tactile Input

When using our hands in a purposeful manner, we need to be able to use our tactile (touch) sensory system. Students who have limited visual ability, may have reduced intention to explore. Consequently, some students may rely on other sensory systems to participate in activities, (e.g., hearing, smell, taste, movement and/or touch). When some children begin to use their hands to explore, they may be somewhat hypersensitive to touch (i.e., tactile input), and new or unexpected sensations may appear to startle and sometimes frighten them. **How can we assist them to become more comfortable with learning through touching?**

The following are some strategies...

- try gradually introducing a variety of tactile experiences, within the form of play and fun, where your student feels comfortable to explore.
- try not to offer hand over hand assistance constantly throughout the activity; give assistance, then "back off" and offer gentle prompts at the elbow or wrist. To reduce the amount of hand over hand assistance, try using a "universal cuff" or "hand strap" to help your student maintain a grasp of the toy or object.
- verbally prepare (prompt) your student before you take their arm or hand.
- offer gentle words of encouragement, giving the message that you will not hurt them.
- positively reinforce your student when s/he has done a "good job".
- give your student some free time to explore and do whatever s/he wants to do with the object. This may mean that your student will bang the table to make a noise or may even put it object to their mouth for oral exploration. This is all part of the process of learning how to use one's hands.
- try to start and finish activity sessions with sensory experiences your student enjoys, (e.g., listening to music, vibration etc.) to establish comfort level
- introduce new tactile stimuli within enjoyable, comfortable and secure routines or settings, (e.g. on the mat or during music time). The same approach applies in providing preferred and familiar tactile experiences when introducing a new setting.
- provide deep pressure by weight bearing or joint compression through the arms and hands.
- massage your student's arms and hands with deep pressure.
- encourage your student to tap and clap hands to stimulate the proprioceptive sense (e.g., the sense of where arms and hands are within space).

- allow your student to try new sensations on body parts that are less sensitive, (e.g., forearms, back of the hand, heel of the hand, etc.) before using the pads of the fingers, which are more sensitive.
- vibration can be used on its own to encourage your student to actively reach out to explore the sensation; it can also be used in preparation for other sensory activities to see if your student tolerates this longer on more sensitive areas of the body. There are vibrating pillows, slippers, and footbaths available that can be operated with a switch either at home or at school.
- use different surfaces to keep rhythm while listening to different types of music, (e.g., desk, drums, tambourine, etc.). Encourage your student to use the heel of the hand to make contact with the instrument.
- dry your student's hands with a towel or hair dryer as appropriate to the activity and location for a change in sensory experience.
- give a firm hand to hand shake or "high 5" as a greeting with peers and other persons in your student's life.



This student is holding his hand up for a "high five" as a greeting to others.



This student is using his switch to enjoy the vibration on his arm.