

## Tactile

It is common for CYP to experience periods of time when they are sensitive to tactile stimulation. The tactile system is also prone to being affected by environments, stress levels and can be impacted upon by lack of experiences

If a CYP is **seeking** more tactile stimulation the basic approach is to allow this need to be fed but in ways that are appropriate for the setting and the CYP's level of development.

If what the CYP is doing works for them, does not disturb their work and is appropriate to the setting, let it happen. If it is not, try and find a way that this can be channelled but still allow tactile system to be fed.

It is important that activities are also CYP led.

### What you Might See

As described in the 'What you might see' overview, **Appendix 3**






If a CYP is **seeking** more tactile stimulation, they may:

- Explore their environment by licking, mouthing and touching beyond that which is developmentally appropriate
- Seek out messy experiences
- Fiddle and fidget excessively
- Prefer bare feet
- Touch people and their clothes, hair etc. excessively
- Seek out vibratory, hot or cold resources for extreme sensory feedback

If a CYP is **under responsive** to tactile stimulation, they may:








- Not be able to feel touch in the same way as others do
- Have a limited response to pain and changes in temperature
- Have difficulty with tactile discrimination
- Self-harm (bite, scratch, pull out own hair etc.)
- Struggle with getting dressed, toileting etc.
- Struggle with practical lessons/eye-hand coordination
- Not be aware of having dirty hands and face
- Not notice or cry when bumped, scraped or cut self

You can support these **under-responsive tactile** sensory processing needs by using some of the following activities:






What you see	Initial activities	When/how long for? techniques	What to be aware of?	Images/ examples
CYP is touching people/ objects more than usual	Have tactile rich options to offer (see list in additional tactile activities)	Timetabled sensory break  Talk about what is ok and what is not ok for touch	Make sure tactile items are safe for CYP who are still mouthing	
CYP is excessively mouthing items	Offer chew toy and tactile rich toys  Create box of items that CYP can explore with mouth	Timetabled sensory break	Limit use so that experience remains interesting.  Set boundaries to use e.g. CYP can only mouth items in the basket not Lego on the table	Chew toys 
CYP is distracted from activities by looking for messy play	Offer additional opportunities for messy  Hand massage is a quick and easy access to tactile input may help	Timetabled sensory break		
CYP is pinching, biting, picking at self /others	Use of stress balls, fiddle toys, chew toys, tactile rich play opportunities	Timetabled sensory breaks	Is this a way of controlling the environment? Is there behaviour attached to this?	
CYP is pressing parts of body into particular surfaces e.g. bare tummy onto cold floor or ridged cord carpet	Offer other deep pressure options See sensory balancing activities tools		Offering deep pressure can help to give some input to the tactile system, and be calming for CYP	

Step 2 Tactile

You can support these **under-responsive tactile** sensory processing needs by using some of the following activities:  
continued

What you see	Initial activities	When/how long for? techniques	What to be aware of?	Images/ examples
CYP is distracted by fiddling with clothing, resources, fabrics	Offer tactile rich play experiences such as textural treasure baskets	During focussed activities to support concentration	Offer to support concentration rather than as distraction.	
CYP wants to be outside in extreme weather	Offer play times outside but establish patterns of behaviour linked to weather as CYP will not register cold as easily		Remember to teach appropriate responses to cold weather e.g. 'we wear a coat when it's raining'	
CYP is seeking vibration or extreme tactile experiences	Offer time limited access to toys/resources with vibration element		Be aware that use of vibration can over stimulate.	! 
CYP is exploring by placing inedible items into mouth	Offer messy food play	Timetabled sensory breaks	Be aware of and avoid substances in the environment that are unsafe to be mouthed/eaten	
CYP refuses to wear shoes/clothes preferring to have bare feet or to undress	Offer play that allows texture rich experiences e.g. stepping stones and bare foot walks	Timetabled sensory breaks	Limit use and try to encourage when ok and when not	
CYP rubs bites or scratches skin	Use alternative tactile input- tactile rich play baskets with textures they will enjoy exploring	Timetabled sensory breaks		
CYP is seeking extreme temperatures e.g. licking freezer, touching hot radiator repeatedly	Access to safe hot/ cold items e.g. Heated wheat bags, hand warmers	Timetabled sensory breaks  Teach behavioural strategies to avoid extreme temperatures	! Be aware that CYP may not register extremes and will require close supervision to ensure their safety	! 

**Tactile Discrimination (under responsive)**

What you see	Initial activities	When/how long for/ techniques	What to be aware of?	Images
CYP has difficulty regulating their temperature control	Offer tactile rich play to encourage discrimination skills	Use cognitive strategies to teach CYP what to wear	Safety and teaching to rely more on behavioural checks rather than sensory discrimination	
CYP has a difficulty feeling differences in objects/dressing self	Offer feely games to encourage identification of objects e.g. in dry pasta/feely bags  Practice buttons and zips use away from expectations to dress selves		Remember impact this may have on practical skills such as use of buttons and zips, and dressing skills. Encourage breakdown of these activities to practice components	
CYP not noticing that they have minor injuries such as bumped, or grazed skin	Help CYP to check and see if injured following a fall  Offer tactile rich play	Use activities that are rich in tactile experience to encourage tactile registration		
CYP is not registering when nappy is soiled/wet	Keep toileting to a routine	Refer to continence team for support strategies (where appropriate)	Are they ready for a toileting programme? Are they able to retain fluids? May require support for toilet training routines	
CYP does not respond appropriately to hot radiator etc.	Engage in tactile rich play to increase registration	Use cognitive techniques to teach danger	Think about safety in the environment	!
CYP does not notice that they have dropped something (This may also relate to motor co-ordination)	Try using heavier versions of everyday items such as cutlery, to increase registration	During routine activities	May need referral to OT	
CYP does not respond to physical prompts given	Offer visual and verbal prompts also	Give more processing time		
When CYP is slow to register a tactile experience	Increase sensory richness in daily activities	Give more processing time	Sometimes this is about learning levels and exposure to a new experience	

## Step 2 Tactile

The Tactile system is closely linked to the fight, flight or freeze reaction. It is important that you look carefully at your CYP's responses and be led in your introduction of new activities.

If a CYP has an over-responsive reaction - do not force tactile experiences, remember the fight or flight response!

If a CYP is displaying a defensive response to tactile input (over-responsive), these are the elements of behaviour that need to be addressed first. Think about how this is affecting the CYP's experiences. Think about what the causes of this might be? Person/ environment/ learning/ exposure - past experiences.

An over-responsive experience can lead to an overload of the sensory systems and a fight, flight or freeze response

**Always be gentle** with your handling of an over-responsive reaction. If a CYP is challenged to the point of overload this may result in an increased defensive response and in turn an increased reaction to the same event occurring next time.

## What you Might See

As described in the 'What you might see' overview

A CYP who is **over responsive** to tactile stimulation may:

- Be tactile defensive
- Dislike various body parts touching surfaces
- Be oversensitive to clothes, labels and seams etc.
- Have a low pain threshold
- Become distressed around self-care routines
- Avoid certain foods/textures
- Dislike changes in weather conditions

## Addressing Defensive Responses

Use deep pressure and calming tools to dampen an over-reaction to tactile stimulation.

If a CYP has a strong reaction to a tactile experience; reactions to clothing, messy play, certain textures... engage in a very gradual process of **desensitisation**. This means very slowly exposing the CYP to the source of the defensive response in a way that is led by the CYP and very gradually breaks down the contact in stages.

This may start with offering the activity in the same room as the CYP but not expecting them to engage with it.

Think of an experience that the CYP enjoys to couple with an activity that they are less sure of.

Be patient with this process.



## Think!

- **Person** What are the CYP's patterns in the day? When do they most need a calming option?
- **Place** What is the environment like? Is this overloading, or just right for them?
- **Activity** What are you asking the CYP to do? Is this reaction to an activity that is too hard, or is not offering enough stimulation / has it gone on too long, or not long enough?

You can support these **over responsive tactile** sensory processing needs by using some of the following activities:

What you see	Initial activities	When/how long for/ techniques	What should I be aware of?	Images
CYP is avoiding holding hands, or cuddles	Use firm touch rather than light  CYP may want to hold sleeve rather than hand  Remember CYP has the right to say no!	When offering comfort  As required for safety purposes	Contact needs to be under CYP's control Use gradual techniques to accept contact	
CYP dislikes standing too close to others	Allow CYP space at beginning or end of Queue  Give extended personal space	Think about environments and routines	Child's position in their environment	
CYP struggles with certain clothing on skin	CYP to choose under layer they like Remove labels/ avoid tags and seams Turn base layers inside out to	Think about PE transitions	Adaptations to uniform/dress code may need to be made	
CYP overreacts to minor injuries	Use calming strategies see <a href="#">activities to balance sensory systems table</a>	Use cognitive approaches to calming		
CYP is distressed by nails cuts, haircuts, teeth cleaning etc	Introduce independent self-care skills as soon as possible so CYP has an element of control over stimulation	Use calming / <a href="#">deep pressure strategies before and during</a> the activity	Use de-sensitisation strategies to encourage CYP to tolerate a little more stimulation each time	
CYP avoids messy play/activities	Use tools rather than hands and contain messy play area  Offer gloves for washing pots etc.	Offer very gradual exposure- set at CYP's pace	THINK: Person Environment Occupation  Is what you are asking reasonable and meaningful?	
CYP overheats easily/ Feels cold more acutely	Offer layers of clothing	Teach cognitive strategies to understanding what clothes to wear for what weathers	Think about environment- is it ok for them?	

Step 2 Tactile

<p>CYP avoids certain foods and textures</p>	<p>Games that encourage use of mouth muscle control- such as blowing bubbles, blowing through straw, use of suck and swallow control</p>	<p>Use <a href="#">deep pressure</a> activities before and during mealtimes</p>	<p>This may be a reaction that relates to features of ASD-rigid routines around foods.</p> <p>May require analysis with SLT team for specialist feeding assessment</p>	
<p>CYP overreacts to contact- sees a light brush of the arm as a painful experience</p>	<p>Grade use of tactile rich experiences on CYP's terms and at their pace</p>	<p>Use firm touch rather than light touch</p>	<p>Use firm touch rather than light touch</p>	

## Tactile - Additional Activities Sheet

These lists are by no means definitive but a good starting point to discover what does and does not work for individuals.

It is important to bear in mind age and appropriateness to setting when choosing activities from the lists. Some activities will be more appropriate for younger children and others for young adults whereas some will be more appropriate for home, nursery, school, outdoors etc.

### Sensory Seeking

- Tactile bare foot trail using squares of Astroturf, corrugated card/tin, spikey bathmat, fluffy fleece, cold metal tray, bubble wrap, sticky jelly mat etc.
- Tactile wall display with similar materials as above
- Books/folders made with whole pages of similar materials as above
- Tactile obstacle course using spikey gym ball to roll over, bubble wrap tube to crawl through, roll of sandpaper to walk over, steps covered with different materials to climb, tough spot of jelly to walk through etc
- Sensory chews, chewelry, chewy pencil toppers
- Oral massagers such as Z Vibe
- Electric toothbrush
- Vibrating hairbrush
- Resources to pinch such as stress balls, playdough, Blu tack, thinking putty, pegs, chalk balls etc.
- Resources to pull such as koosh ball, hair bobbles, resistance band, thinking putty, Blu tack
- Hotdog game

### Tactile treasure baskets

- Baskets/boxes/bags of items made from similar materials e.g. hairbrush, toothbrush, nail brush, long and short haired make up brushes, body brush, dolls with haircut very short etc.
- Baskets/boxes/bags of items made from a variety of materials such as brushes, scourers, fluffy dusting mitts, sandpaper, rubbery stretch toys, space blanket, wooden beads thread onto lace, metal spoon, bean bags with different fillings, squashy jelly toys etc.
- Baskets/boxes/bags of safe items to be mouthed/licked such as metal spoons/bowls (could be stored in fridge for added stimulation), small jam jars, safety mirrors, sensory chews with a variety of textures, teethers, toothbrushes, koosh balls, washable fabrics etc.



**Under Responsive:** Any activities from above list plus

### Exaggerated tactile experiences

- Cold resources taken from fridge/freezer such as ice packs, metal bowls/spoons, frozen yogurt pouches, mirrors, chewys/teethers etc.
- Warmed resources such as wheat bags, cherry stone cushions, heated teddies, hand warmers, hot water bottles etc.
- Pan scourers
- Loofahs
- Vibrating toys, massagers, brushes, teethers
- Water play with whisks and bubbles
- Finger/hand/feet painting
- Cold water hose pipe play
- Deep/large container play so more of body receives input e.g. bath of jelly, large box of packing chips, tough spot of foam for snow angels
- Spikey massage rollers
- Gloves made from variety of fabrics including, rubber, silk, hessian, fleece, woollen and exfoliating mitts
- Sensory exploration play mats with fabrics such as ribbons, lengths of leather, threaded beads/buttons, cord and fur etc. sewn into it
- Dressing up clothes made from Lycra, hessian, wool, cord, rubber etc. with deep seams, tags, rough labels and tactile patches sewn in/on
- Sensory umbrellas (search Flo Longhorn 'Sensology' for ideas)
- Rub a dub dub game. Encourage washing using a variety of textures of soaps (foam, cream, bar, grainy exfoliating) and various scrubbers (flannel, sponge, natural sponge, loofah, exfoliating mitt, body brush)
- Bare foot sensory walk through puddles, mud, sand, gravel and grass
- Washing large equipment

### Messy play

- Sand wet/dry
- Hot/cold water
- Ice cubes/crushed ice
- Foam
- Home-made dough with textures incorporated such as rice, sand, beads
- Play snow
- Dry rice
- Dry pasta
- Soil/compost
- Leaves
- Corn flour
- Pea gravel
- Decorative glass beads (cooled in fridge)
- Packing chips
- Water beads
- Dry lentils, couscous, quinoa, peas and beans

### Messy food play (edible)

- Dry cereal such as rice crispies, cornflakes, crushed shredded wheat etc.
- Popcorn
- Oats/oatmeal
- Cooked rice
- Cooked pasta/spaghetti
- Cooked grains and lentils
- Jelly
- Custard
- Mousse
- Custard powder and water mix
- Gravy
- Cheese sauce
- Sticky jam, chocolate spread, honey etc.
- Vegetable/fruit mash or purees
- Mixing, rolling, patting cookie dough
- Kneading bread dough
- Edible playdough or chocolate modelling clay
- Rolling down grassy hills
- Swimming/hot tub
- Battery operated bubble blowers to blast child/young person with bubbles in face or on body parts

### Tactile discrimination activities

- Feely bags with one different item to be found within many the same e.g. lots of packing chips and one koosh ball or lots of wooden blocks with one plastic block
- Feely bags with familiar items of very different textures to be matched with another laid out on a tray e.g. favourite soft toy, koosh ball, plastic car, wooden skittle and body brush. Begin with one pair of items (one to feel one to see) to build the link between tactile input and visual input
- Once child is able to describe item in bag increase the difficulty by adding another item to the table (one to feel two to see) until she/he can identify and match from a selection on the table
- Feely bags as above to be identified by touch alone once above activity is achieved
- Feely bag of matching pairs of fabric squares
- Place familiar items in pockets to be identified by touch alone
- Blind fold game with items to be identified by touch alone
- Similar items made from different materials to be explored and labelled e.g. 'hard' wooden block, 'soft' fabric block, 'sticky' rubber block, 'squashy' plastic block, 'rough' sandpaper block, 'bumpy' textured block and 'scratchy' Velcro block (linking touch to language)

## Over Responsive

### Tactile desensitisation activities

- Treasure basket/box of favoured tactile items to play with. Add one unfamiliar but similar item at a time until tolerated then another
- Offer non preferred or unfamiliar tactile resources to back of hand or other body parts initially, remove if negative response is given and try again later
- Place tactile items within reach but remove pressure to touch, children are more likely to explore when no one is looking
- Provide gloves to access messy play
- Provide tools to use in messy play
- Introduce messy play materials gently, increasing volume and variety as tolerated e.g. start with spoonful of sand in play tray initially and build up to sand pit. Once tolerated move on to another similar material such as dry rice
- Place favoured items in messy play such as train in sand, favourite character in play snow, favourite chewy in jelly etc.
- Introduce messy materials into favoured play such as water for puddles, AstroTurf for fields and sand for driveways in car play
- Introduce small fan at a distance, gradually increase speed of breeze, size of fan and proximity to child as can be tolerated until child can tolerate windy day outside
- Use a mirror and social stories alongside calming deep pressure for personal care routines. This will enable child/young person to anticipate what touch to expect and when it will end

### Oral desensitisation activities

- Start with face, cheeks, jaw and lips before attempting tactile
- exploration with mouth
- Provide positive oral/facial stimulation e.g. strokes with favoured fabrics or vibration
- Facial massage
- Z Vibe massage
- Encourage taking favoured toys/items to mouth to explore
- Smear favoured foods such as jam, chocolate spread and cheese spread on items taken to mouth such as chewys, dummy, back of hand, wooden toys etc.
- Incorporate new textures into foods gently starting with those most similar to already tolerated foods