

Tactile System

The tactile system is responsible for our sense of touch. As a baby it is one of the first sensory systems that we receive information from. It tells us about the world around us. Efficient processing of tactile information is important in making the child feel safe in their world. It is an important factor in the child's emotional and social development.



The tactile system has two functions, **discriminative** and **protective**.

The **discriminative** part of the system lets us know what we are touching, what it feels like and where we are being touched. When there is a problem with the discriminatory system this can affect the child's ability to learn motor skills, particularly fine motor skills. It can also affect speech. The tactile system integrates with the visual system and enables a child to see and feel objects in 3D.

The **protective** part of the system alerts us to danger and enables us to respond to the environment in order to protect ourselves. It can cause a reaction of fight, fright or flight. Problems with the protective system can make a child interpret safe touch as threatening, for example, general body contact when lining up after break time. To some onlookers the child's exaggerated response may be interpreted as inappropriate behaviour. This can have an effect on their social development.



Both systems work together to interpret sensory information for function and at times for basic survival.

Some of the children may be sensory seeking or sensory avoiding or a combination of both.

Here are some activity ideas that will help develop your child's tactile system. Please note, a child with tactile defensiveness should never be forced to touch anything they do not want to, as this will cause further apprehension and avoidance so please be guided by your child.

- Fill a tub with dry pasta, lentils and rice. Hide some small toys, pompoms or other small items in it. Submerge hands into the tub and try to find them by using touch alone.



- Place some household items or toys on a tray and hide them under a cloth, in a pillow case or have your child wear a blindfold. Can your child describe the texture, shape and size of the items? Try to identify the items by touch only.

- Have two sets of identical items.

Place one set in a bag, box or pillow case where they can't be seen. Show your child the item you wish them to find. They can touch them to learn the shape. Without peeking into the bag, can they find the matching item?

- Play-doh/Silly Putty Scented Play-doh
- Draw patterns/pictures in shaving foam
- Make "gloop" by mixing cornstarch and water
- Use feathers to lightly skim skin
- Fingerprinting
- Use a towel to rub down you child's body after a warm bath (firm, quick strokes)
- Use various sponges, washcloths, and loofahs in the bath
- Use lotion and massage hands/feet
- Wearing spandex/lycra/base layers under regular clothes for calming, evenly distributed deep pressure input
- Use vibrating toys or massagers. (If your child is fearful of it, let them control the on/off switch and let them massage you or a stuffed animal first. When they are ready you can help them or they can do it themselves.
- Sand or water play.



Further resources:

For more resources to help with developing skills or for further helpful tips and tricks, please visit our website or lookout for our Facebook posts.

www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/cypot

www.facebook.com/CYPOTNHSBorders

If you would like more information on sensory integration, please watch our mini-series.

[Sensory Integration Mini Series - YouTube](#)

