



TACTILE

Recommendations

Trauma can profoundly affect the tactile (touch) sensory system, which processes information from the skin about touch, pressure, texture, temperature, and pain. For children who have experienced trauma, the tactile system may become hyperreactive or underresponsive, often influenced by the brain's heightened state of hypervigilance.



What might you notice

Tactile Defensiveness:

The child may perceive certain touch sensations as aversive or threatening, even if they are neutral or gentle. Light touches, unexpected contact, or certain textures (e.g., clothing tags, rough fabrics) may cause distress.

Heightened Startle Response:

Unexpected tactile input, such as a brush against their arm or bumping into a peer, can trigger a fight, flight, or freeze response.

Avoidance Behaviours:

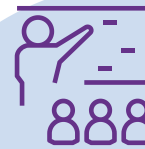
The child may avoid activities involving touch, such as group games, messy play, or close proximity to others.

Under-Responsiveness or Numbing:

Conversely, some children may show reduced sensitivity to tactile input, seeming unaware of pain, temperature, or physical discomfort.

Difficulty with Regulation:

Hypervigilance can make it hard for the child to tolerate or adapt to tactile sensations, leading to emotional dysregulation.



Impact on learning

Challenges with Physical Interactions

The child may struggle with casual touch, such as handshakes, pats on the back, or lining up closely with peers. They may react strongly to accidental bumps or brushes, escalating minor incidents into significant disruptions.

Avoidance of Activities

Activities like art, crafts, or sensory play (e.g., finger painting, clay) may feel overwhelming due to the tactile input required. They may refuse to participate in group activities involving close contact or shared spaces.

Clothing Sensitivities

The child may be distracted or distressed by certain clothing textures, seams, or tags, affecting their ability to focus.

Emotional and Behavioural Responses

Tactile discomfort may lead to irritability, withdrawal, or outbursts. The child might appear overly controlling, insisting on personal space or avoiding interactions altogether.

Difficulty with Focus and Learning

Persistent discomfort or vigilance about touch can divert attention from academic tasks.



TACTILE HACKS

Strategies for children who are sensitive to tactile input

Classroom Environment

- Allow the child to choose their seat to reduce accidental brushing from others.
- Use visual and verbal cues instead of physical prompts.
- Establish clear personal space (e.g., taped boundaries on the floor, "no-touch" zones or privacy shields)
- Offer a quiet corner with soft seating where they can retreat when overwhelmed.
- Place them at the end of a row or near a wall to limit touch from peers. A view of the door can also be reassuring.
- Think about the spaces which typically are busier (cloakrooms, entrance ways), how can you make this feel easier to navigate?

Learning Supports

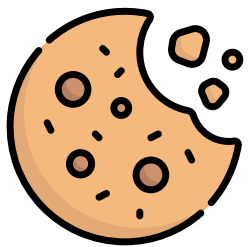
- Let the child use tools (e.g., paintbrushes, gloves, tweezers) to interact with materials.
- Offer alternative materials (e.g., dry textures instead of wet/slimy ones in sensory bins).
- Use gradual exposure to help desensitise them (e.g., touching a texture briefly before full engagement).
- Have a dry cloth/towel available for the child to wipe their hands
- Use a "high-five or wave" system instead of handshakes or pats.
- Teach peers about personal space rules in a positive way (e.g., using a social story).
- Provide weighted lap pads, stress balls, or textured strips for self-regulation.
- Allow a personal comfort object in their workspace to help with grounding.

Social Supports

- Gradual Exposure: Gradually introduce the child to textures or sensations that trigger hypersensitivity. Start with less intense stimuli and gradually increase exposure over time. This should be facilitated through a trusted adult.
- Teach them to use code words or gestures if they feel overwhelmed.
- Reinforce that it's okay to say "no" to unwanted touch in a respectful way.
- Ask the child prior to touching them – e.g. 'Suzie you have some grass on your back, do you want me to brush it off for you?' / 'John, your collar looks twisted and uncomfortable. Shall I fix that for you?'
- Use a firmer pressure when touching the child – don't squeeze or hurt them but avoid being very light with your touch
- Avoid tickling the child. Sometimes children with touch sensitivity will laugh when tickled, but watch that this isn't a nervous laugh indicating they are uncomfortable

Individual Supports

- Sensory-Friendly Clothing: Choose clothing with soft, tagless seams and fabrics that the child finds comfortable. Let the child participate in selecting their clothing to increase their sense of control.
- Weighted Clothing or Blankets: Some children find comfort in weighted items like vests or blankets, as the deep pressure can help regulate their sensory system.
- Wear seamless socks or turn socks inside out
- Try tighter clothing, such as, lycra, as this may be less annoying than loose clothing
- Offer calming breaks with deep-pressure activities (e.g., pushing against a wall, using a weighted blanket).
- Encourage proprioceptive input (e.g., carrying books, squeezing putty) to help regulate tactile sensitivities.
- Massage and Deep Pressure: Gentle massages or deep pressure activities like rolling a therapy ball over the body can provide calming sensory input.



TACTILE SNACKS

Soothing sensory strategies to try

Regulate to
LEARN



Calming Tactile Input

- Weighted blankets or lap pads – Provide grounding and a sense of security.
- Compression clothing or snug-fitting vests – Offer gentle, continuous pressure.
- Tight hugs (if welcomed) or self-hugging techniques – Help regulate the nervous system.
- Lying under a heavy pillow or cushion – Creates a safe, cocooning sensation.
- Wall pushes or gentle squeezes on arms and legs – Provide proprioceptive input for grounding.
- Soft, fuzzy, or textured fabrics (e.g., fleece, silk, plush toys) – Soothing and comforting.
- Therapeutic putty, playdough, or kinetic sand – Offers slow, calming hand movements.
- Warm water play or hand soaks – Soothes and relaxes muscles.
- Gentle hand massages with lotion – Nourishing and calming through rhythmic touch.
- Using a warm pack on the shoulders or lap – Helps reduce stress and tension.
- Barefoot walking on soft grass, sand, or carpet – Encourages sensory grounding.
- Smooth stones, worry stones, or sensory beads – Provide a calming, repetitive motion.
- Petting a soft animal (real or stuffed toy) – Can be deeply soothing.
- Holding a weighted stuffed animal – Combines deep pressure with comforting texture.

Transition Support

- Give advance notice before activities involving touch (e.g., group work, art, PE).
- Provide a visual schedule so they know when physical contact may occur.
- Encourage proprioceptive input (e.g., carrying books, squeezing putty) to help regulate tactile sensitivities.
- Map out spaces so the child knows how to navigate the environment without feeling overwhelmed.
- Allow child to leave the classroom first / gather their belongings before peers to reduce likelihood of being squashed or others bumping into them.
- Instead of insisting a child holds hands, offer a piece of fabric or 'link'



Voice of the child Questions to ask

- What is your favourite thing to hold or touch?
- Are there any touch feelings that you don't like?
- What clothing feels most comfortable for you? What feels least comfortable?
- Do you like having messy hands?
- What kind of touch makes you feel calm? (eg; stroking soft fur, squeezing squidgy items, picking objects)
- Do you like others being close to you?



Learning Supports

- Allow the use of squeeze balls, textured fabric, quiet fidgets, or theraputty to help them stay focused.
- Use Velcro strips, silicone patches, or textured tape under desks or on notebooks for grounding.
- Provide a "fidget basket" with a variety of appropriate tactile options to support self-regulation.
- Incorporate sandpaper letters, textured tracing mats, or raised-line paper for writing tasks.
- Use kinetic sand, playdough, or modelling clay in literacy and numeracy activities.
- Encourage finger tracing, air writing, or forming letters with sensory materials for spelling and handwriting.
- Offer a weighted lap pad, shoulder wrap, or compression vest during seated work.

Individual Supports

- Heavy work can be a helpful strategy to help to support children with tactile sensitivity. It is thought that the sensory inputs a child, or adult, receives from heavy tasks helps to regulate their touch sense.
- Oral activities can also help with regulation, particularly chewing and sucking.
- Weighted products can be useful to help children to regulate
- Let them use a soft blanket over their knees or textured cushion to provide grounding input.
- Use a stretchy resistance band around chair legs for foot-based tactile input.
- Trial a foot roller for tactile feedback on the feet while learning