



## Sensory processing signs of difficulty – Tactile (touch)

You will have heard about our 8 sensory systems: hearing, sight, taste, smell, touch, vestibular, proprioception and interoception. You will have also heard about how we process our sensory information, we receive and organise sensation from the environment, then we process that information and make an effective meaningful response.

Now we can consider what it may look and feel like if we have a difference in our tactile sensory system.

### Tactile sensory system

Our sense of touch has a huge impact on how we feel. Through touch our bodies make sense of information we feel through our skin. It helps us to tell the difference between different textures, sizes, and shapes of objects. If a person is constantly reacting to touch it can be difficult to focus on a task or activity.

### Processing tactile sensory information



You will remember that we used cups to describe how we register sensory information.

When we have a little cup, it does not take much information before we notice it - your little cup fills up very quickly! We call this over responsive.



When we have a big cup, it takes a lot more information for us to notice - it takes more to fill up our cup. We call this under responsive.

Remember that this is not always a problem, and that our ability to register, process and integrate our sensory information can sometimes feel difficult - when we are tired, unwell, or overwhelmed it can feel like our cup fills up quickly.

### **Signs of Difficulty:**

Over responsive 	Under responsive 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pulls away from activities which involve touch and/or texture</li><li>• Dislikes labels or seams on clothing</li><li>• Extreme dislike of haircuts, teeth brushing</li><li>• Strong reactions to messy or wet textures</li><li>• Frequently drops objects</li><li>• Selective eating for specific textures</li><li>• Dislike of crowded or busy environments</li><li>• Toe walking</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May not appear to respond to pain or temperature changes</li><li>• Loves hugs</li><li>• Mouths or chews objects</li><li>• Likes messy play</li><li>• May stand too close to others</li><li>• Frequently touches objects or people</li><li>• Strong preference to wear tight clothing</li><li>• May be heavy handed</li></ul>

## Strategies to support:

Over responsive 	Under responsive 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try to avoid unexpected or unpredictable tactile experiences</li><li>• Having an individual floor space, or sit at the end of a row</li><li>• Seamless socks, or socks inside out</li><li>• Cut labels out</li><li>• Involve children in their choice of clothing fabric</li><li>• Brushing or massage before the experience</li><li>• Big bear hugs or pressure through the shoulders before the experience</li><li>• Using weighted items</li><li>• Oral input can be calming during a tactile experience - chewing, sucking, blowing, jaw squeeze</li><li>• It can help to know how long the experience will last for - that there is a beginning and an end. Consider using visual timers, counting to 3 or a familiar song to help the child know when it will end.</li><li>• Consider graded and structured introduction of the unfavoured tactile experience;<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Good preparation</li><li>✓ Counting or singing</li><li>✓ Praise immediately afterward</li><li>✓ Reward system</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Range and variety of tactile input available</li><li>• Always provide input prior to an activity</li><li>• Fidget toys (with clear rules!)</li><li>• Messy play</li><li>• Vibration</li><li>• Textured pencil covers</li><li>• Sit on a textured surface or wobble cushion</li></ul>

