



Tactile Defensive Support

Cheat Sheet

Children with tactile processing issues register certain sensations as "threats" causing them to overreact to the everyday demands of life, to have trouble doing things on their own and to avoid exploring their environment.

When a child is fearful about exploring his environment he will have less exposure to sensory input and fewer opportunities for sensory integration which is the foundation of brain development; when the tactile system isn't functioning well, it directly impacts a child's development.

Signs of tactile defensiveness:

- Fearful of crowds
- Dislikes hair brushing, teeth brushing, bathing, cutting nails
- Seems anxious or fearful of light touch
- Resists hugs and cuddles (an infant who doesn't like to be held)
- Overreacts to minor scrapes and cuts
- Extremely ticklish
- Walks on tiptoes
- Refuses to walk barefoot on certain surfaces (grass, sand)
- Responds with emotional intensity to light touch
- Completely avoids messy play
- Finds cold or warm weather extremely uncomfortable
- Gets very upset by tags in clothing
- Very picky about clothing
- Picky eater

Remember: This is a brain issue, NOT a behavior issue!

Avoid being dismissive/ invalidating of your child's feelings/ experiences. Instead of saying things like, "that doesn't hurt," "why are you crying?" "that's not itchy," try saying, "it looks like that really hurt," "something is really upsetting you," "how can I help?"

Things to Help Your Tactile Defensive Kiddo:

- Before mealtime, encourage oral-motor play - blowing bubbles, chewy toys, drinking through a straw
- Chewing on ice before meals may decrease sensitivity to food textures
- Remove tags from clothing; shop for seamless clothing
- Dry brushing (ask your child's OT)
- Use deep pressure- bear hugs, swaddles and baby wraps for infants, theratog
- Weighted blankets for sleeping
- As much proprioceptive input as possible- lots and lots of "heavy work" activities
- Provide opportunities for scaffolded tactile experiences - model tactile play and start slow; never force your child to participate, let him go at his own speed.