autism wellbeing

Our Senses: Tactile

We process touch whenever we interact with the world using our bodies.

Each of us needs a different level of touch in order to be regulated and in the "just right state" so that we function at our best, connect with others and learn.

Touch includes physical contact with other people. It also involves the feelings we get from wearing certain fabrics and handling different textures.

When people are seeking to regulate their sense of touch, they may appear inappropriate e.g. using their hands for picking up or playing with food, or they may touch things that are dangerous or unsavoury. Help them find more appropriate alternatives that share a similar texture.

- Sensitivities change depending on many things. Don't be alarmed about this. All of our sensory responses fluctuate due to factors like how we feel, how stressed we are, what else is going on around us.
- Some children may find being hugged extremely painful and distressing. This is not necessarily a sign of rejection. Some children and young people need very firm or very gentle touch in order to experience the sensation comfortably.
- Sensitivity can fluctuate and everyone is different. Even a label on clothes can feel uncomfortable for some children. This sensation can even be experienced as painful.
- Other children may not be aware of the sensation of food on their face or they may not notice a cut on their skin.
- If your child likes touch, use sensory toys, or keep something tactile on hand that helps your child stay regulated. A comforter to stroke, something squishy like playdough, a spiky pinecone – whatever it is that your child enjoys and car use to regulate themself.
- Personal care tasks may feel distressing for some children. Having their hair brushed is one example of this. Some children find a deep pressure massage on the head prior to brushing helps, or establishing a routine where the activity happens predictably.
- If your child is going back to school or needs to wear particular clothes that they haven't worn for a while, it may help if they try them out beforehand so that they have an opportunity to get used to them.