Tactile Activities

Experiences for Our Skin

1. ***DEEP PRESSURE:*** The sensation of deep pressure is transmitted by the discriminatory tactile receptors. The pathway of this input is thought to inhibit protective reactions and may explain why deep pressure and proprioception often help to diminish the sensation of pain and tactile defensiveness (Lane, 2002). Do you grab your arm and squeeze it when it has been hurt? Doesn't it feel better to deeply rub the spot an insect just lightly touched? Providing deep pressure touch will give a child discriminatory sensory information to learn from and build a foundation of experience. As in everything we do with a child, this should be done in a kind and loving manner.

   A general way to give deep pressure involves *squeezing* the child's muscles. If he has difficulty controlling his handwriting and it appears to involve tactile perception, you can provide added neurological information by squeezing his wrist, forearm (where the muscles for his fingers are), elbow and shoulder. This squeeze should be done by gripping with your whole hand around the area, not pinching around the arm with your fingers. A pinch will produce a protective response, whereas deep touch produces a discriminatory response. Squeeze *firmly* and smoothly without jerking, holding the squeeze for 5 or more seconds. This may be done several times. Try this on yourself first – you will be surprised how much it feels like a massage! This can be done on the above-mentioned areas plus the ankle, foot, knee, (avoid the lower leg), and as a general deep hug of the trunk. If a child becomes rowdy, or responds in an "FFF" (Flight, Fright, Fight) manner, a long, deep general hug of the trunk will often make a difference. The stimulation of the tactile discriminatory system may override the protective responses he is displaying. This may not only provide a momentary input and response, but will also continually build the foundation of experience.

   Important to Note: A pinch will produce a *protective* response, whereas deep touch produces a *discriminatory* response.

Deep pressure given at specific points also has a great benefit. When giving this pressure, use only the thumb to press into the belly of a muscle or over a specific joint (see below for areas to avoid). With the thumb, push down firmly, straight toward the bone, without vibrating or shaking the thumb. The shaking motion could irritate the muscle and the child! In bony areas such as the hand, the pressure necessary to reach the surface of the bone is not as great (see Writing Glove in Chapter 10 for more information).

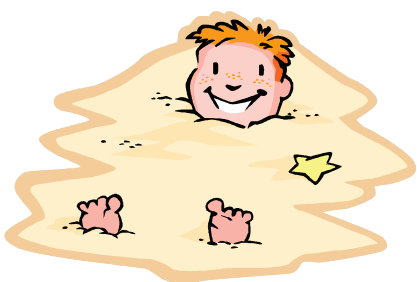
This pressure can be applied along the sides of the spinal column, the outside of the upper arm and forearm, and the sole of the foot (avoiding the arch). Other areas should be avoided, such as the inside of the forearm or the calf muscle, as they would be irritated by this deep pressure (try it on yourself!).

2. ***BATH TIME:*** During bath time with a young child, use firm pressure when soaping the child with a washcloth, sponge or shower brush. Give towel rubdowns after the bath, and apply lotion with firm strokes. For an older child, encourage him to do the same as he bathes himself.

3. ***BODY PAINT:*** The child can pretend to paint his body with a large paintbrush, dry or with water, while identifying the body parts he paints.

4. ***PLASTIC POOL FUN:*** Fill a small plastic swimming pool with water, or water and sponges, (even water with a few ice cubes) to allow the child to experiment with texture, temperature and splashing. You may also fill the plastic pool with dry sponges, pillows and towels, or plastic balls. Use only swimming suits here, to allow for greater tactile experience.

5. ***DISAPPEARING KIDS:*** Bury the child's feet, arms, legs, hands, or body in sand, leaves or grass clippings, and then hose him off. Don't forget to scrub dry with a towel.



6. ***TENDERFOOT:*** Young children who avoid certain tactile information may not enjoy taking their shoes off or lying down in the grass. This should be encouraged to help normalize their sensation. If it is too "intense" for them, then begin with deep pressure over the sole of the foot and deep squeezes. Then, immediately afterward they may be able to tolerate and learn from the light touch of grass on their skin.

7. ***TICKLING WATER:*** Have the child run through or sit in a sprinkler, then rub himself down briskly with a towel and sunscreen.



8. ***STICKER GAMES:*** Put small stickers on various body parts. Can the child name the body part you have put the sticker on or name it as you pull the sticker off?

9. ***SQUISHY:*** With clay or other modeling dough, encourage squeezing and squishing. The child should use his whole hand – including his palm – as he manipulates the clay. If he only pokes at it with his fingers, desensitize the area by giving deep pressure or use the Writing Glove (see Chapter 10). With this added information, he may be able to tolerate putting his whole hand in the clay.

10. ***PALM PAINT:*** Painting with the fingers often encourages use of only the tips of the fingers. A more appropriate and developmental method is to "palm paint" on waxed paper with paints or with instant pudding! Or, use elbows and feet to paint a wall covered in paper!

11. ***GOOP:*** Play with "goop" (1/2 cup glue and 1/2 cup liquid starch). Mix and enjoy!

