Oral Activities

For Oral Stimulation

Below are a few activities to provide input to those who need oral stimulation on a regular basis. These activities should not be limited to toddlers!

1. ***BLOWING*** is a great activity that helps support the trunk and chest muscles needed for posture and breathing. Inexpensive and readily available toys include kazoos, party blowers and horns. Children may also enjoy blowing cotton balls across the desk using a straw. Blowing bubbles of all kinds is a fun activity. Use straws or tubes to blow bubbles in the bath (with or without bubble bath).



2. ***CHEWING*** food or gum provides a more appropriate alternative to chewing holes in clothing. If a child is stressed or doing a task requiring concentration (such as academic work), provide something for him to suck or chew on. His attention level will increase, and his frustration will decrease. Rubber tubing is one alternative. Latex-free tubing is usually available in large drug stores. Tie a knot in one end and allow him to chew away. Or, whatever happened to chewing on a stem of grass?



3. ***SUCKING*** through a straw provides significant oral stimulation. The resistance of the sports bottle with an attached straw of a large diameter provides even more stimulation. It is also important to remember that hydration is critical for growing children. Allowing them to have a bottle of water with a straw throughout the day will address both needs.





4. ***EATING:*** Different foods tend to have different properties and we can use these to help children. Sweet things have an immediate *calming* effect (believe it or not!). Sour flavors (lemon drops) are *alerting*, spicy foods (salsa) are *more alerting*, and spicy, hot, bitter foods (lemon peel or fresh jalapeño) are the *most alerting*.

The oral movement needed to eat these foods follows a similar pattern. Sucking (on a hard candy or finger) is *calming*. Chewing (on candy or an eraser) helps the child to *concentrate* and organize his thoughts. Crunching (on pretzels or a pencil) is *alerting*. Foods that can be categorized as "heavy work" by use of jaw and cheek muscles can help to "alert or calm" (Williams & Shellenberger, 2001).

Sucking foods are items such as hard candy and frozen pops.

Chewy foods may consist of granola bars, fruit leather, dried fruit and gum.

Crunchy foods include popcorn, raw vegetables, crackers, pretzels and nuts.

For more great ideas on "brain food" and other oral exercises, see *Take Five!* by Williams and Shellenberger (2001).

A Note about Mealtime:

Mealtimes can be distressing for everyone. Training and disciplining children should be balanced with an understanding of their needs and abilities. Are they supported at the table? Do their feet touch the floor? Is their chair high enough for them to comfortably reach the table? Is their glass heavy enough not to tip? Can you include foods listed above that will help them? In the following chapters you will also find suggestions about activities that can be used immediately before mealtime. For example, provide a large action activity such as vestibular swinging for him to complete before coming to the table. The residual effect of that activity may help him sit with control.