Tolerating Touch

Some children with deaf-blindness may not like to be touched with certain textures or on certain parts of their bodies. This is called "tactile defensiveness". This sensitivity frequently involves the hands and/or face. It is important to assist the child in tolerating touch and textures for purposes of eating a variety of foods, exploring the environment, and for general learning. There are several ways to encourage the child to explore new textures. This process must be approached gradually, in a step-by-step fashion.

1. Begin with textures that are dry, moving to moist, to wet, and eventually to sticky textures. Present the textures to parts of the body which are not very sensitive (e.g., bony areas, areas not covered by hair, such as elbows, shoulders, and knees). These areas of the body may tolerate the textures first. Present the texture to the back of the hands before the palms.

2. Make the activities part of a fun time. You can do this at bathtime where the texture can be washed off quickly. The child may try to wipe the texture off himself, thereby getting a little on his hands. This will help him get used to the texture.

3. See Fact Sheets on Encouraging Exploration (Order #13) and Developing Independence (Order #10). The earlier you begin this process, the more confident the child will be in accepting and exploring the environment.

Adapted from Sternberg-White, S., Chen D., Watts, J., 1992,
Developing Social-Emotional Skills, INSITE, Utah State University, Logan, Utah

Fact sheets from California Deaf-Blind Services are to be used by both families and professionals serving individuals with dual sensory impairments. The information applies to students 0-22 years of age. The purpose of the fact sheet is to give general information on a specific topic. More specific information for an individual student can be provided through individualized technical assistance available from CDBS. The fact sheet is a starting point for further information.

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