



Eating



No skill creates more anxiety in a parent than eating or lack of eating. Children who have difficulty with this skill may have a heightened sensitivity to touch, smell or taste.

Children who are hyposensitive to sensory input may have little awareness of their mouth and how to move their tongue and jaw. They may have poorly organised suck, swallow and breath synchrony.

Some children have such a need for movement that they may not sit still long enough to eat a meal. Their mealtimes may consist of a mouthful every “lap” around the house. Other children may be at the other extreme.

They use the mouth to discover their world. Edible and non-edible items are mouthed, chewed and sometimes swallowed. Developmentally, the mouth is the first area of the body that can interpret sensory feedback accurately.

As the hands develop in their ability to accurately interpret sensory input, they take over as the primary “investigators” of the environment.

Strategies:

- Be aware of textures and temperature of food.
- Apply pressure through the teeth, gums, cheeks and lips to prepare for food.
- Prepare for eating with movement (e.g. sitting on a bouncing ball, parent’s lap, rocker board, move n sit cushion).
- Use a small make-up mirror at the table to help with accuracy in placing food in the mouth and clean up after each bite (the visual system can compensate for decreased feedback through the tactile system).

The advice above is from the following sources:

Jane Horwood: Sensory Circuits: A sensory motor skills programme for children

Paula Aquilla & Ellen Yack: Building Bridges through sensory integration therapy for children with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders

Phoebe Caldwell & Jane Horwood: Using intensive interaction and sensory integration: A handbook for those who support people with severe autism