



# Touch: A Critical Sense for Individuals with Visual Impairments

- The sense of touch is the first sense to develop, and continues to function even as vision and hearing fade. (Nicholas, J., 2010. *From Active Touch to Tactile Communication*)
- Children, all children, learn a lot about their environment through their sense of touch.
- Children who are visually impaired may use touch to “see” the world around them, to “hear” or read communications through gestures, objects, or braille, to “speak” or write through sign language, braille, object symbols, and tactile symbols, as “tools” to find and manipulate objects, and as “emotional regulators” to calm themselves down or rev themselves up. (Miles, B., 2003, *Talking the Language of the Hands to the Hands*, <http://www.nationaldb.org/NCDBProducts.php?prodID=47> )
- Tactile skills develop over time if the child is given many opportunities for actively using hands, feet, lips, tongues, or any of the body to explore and experiment.
- Touch is both receptive and expressive. I can feel something/someone that touches me and I can feel something/someone that I touch. These two types of touch are different.
- Touch can express emotions such as anger, frustration, joy, sadness, silliness.
- There are many different qualities for things we touch such as shape, texture, weight, size, flexibility, temperature, and density. By exploring objects a child learns important concepts.
- Touch sensors are located all over our body. The lips, tongue, fingers and hands have more receptors than most other parts of the body.
- Give a child who is visually impaired a variety of materials to explore whenever they want. Place objects in contained areas (trays or buckets) or attach them nearby with elastic strings.
- Things made of plastic are often boring and uninteresting to touch. Find things that are made of wood, metal, fiber or fabric, paper, cork, pottery or glass, organic material like shell, rock, leaves, or clay can be a lot more interesting and fun to explore through touch.
- Bring your hands under the child’s hands and offer things to your child. Try not to grab the child’s hands or manipulate his/her hands to complete actions. Model the action with your hands underneath or near the child’s hands. (Miles, B., 2003, *Talking the Language of the Hands to the Hands*, <http://www.nationaldb.org/NCDBProducts.php?prodID=47> )



Some of the best “play things” for a visually impaired child do not come from the toy store. Instead, look for real objects that have interesting tactual qualities or objects they may find at home or at school. Suggestions for things that your child might enjoy exploring through touch are listed below. (Adapted from *Space and Self*, Nielsen, L. 1992)

- Strings and laces with knots of various sizes
- Draining sets for soap made from rubber and plastic
- Plaited Christmas stars
- Bottle brush, hairbrush and all kinds of stiff brushes
- Strips of paper, especially metallic glazed paper
- Curlers with prickles and/or brushes
- Chains of beads
- Springs of various types
- Pot cleaners
- A bunch of approximately twenty lengths of straws bundled with a rubberband
- Small grooved baking tins
- Whisks
- Combs with widely spaced teeth
- Forks
- Lollipops made from round sticks dipped in melted sugar and corn flakes
- Inner wrappings from chocolate boxes
- Shuttlecocks from a badminton set
- Funnels made from metal and/or plastic
- Adhesive tape or gummed paper, the material slightly crumpled up to a shape able to be grasped by the child
- Greaseproof paper, tissue paper, wrapping paper (folded or crumpled).
- Two metal teaspoons
- A slightly inflated balloon
- Key bunches of various shapes and materials
- A bunch of plastic measuring spoons
- Christmas bells
- Harmonica, flutes
- Electric toothbrushes
- Ten centimeters long Velcro band, sewed together at one end and supplied with a ring at the other end
- Castanets
- Net containing hazelnuts
- Bunches of 2-5 keys, spoons, pieces of plexiglass, pieces of wood, curlers, curtain rings, key rings, round sticks, combs, pieces of water hose, door hinges, thimbles, springs
- Two nail brushes joined together
- A nail brush and another kind of brush joined together
- A shoe with a lace
- A plastic bottle with a bottle brush
- Purses with various closing mechanisms
- Spectacle case with a spectacle frame
- Net with big and small balls, glass globes or golf balls
- Pieces of metal pipe
- Big metal nuts
- A pedal from a bicycle or trike
- Containers filled with sand
- Stones with a natural hole
- Hot water bottle, filled or partly filled with water or sand
- All kinds of rings
- Handles or horns for bicycles
- Belt buckles
- Plates with holes, big enough to put fingers into
- A piece of thick clothesline
- Turkey baster
- Rubber glove without anything inside
- Rubber gloves containing potato flour or rice flour

