

Sensory Questionnaire

Sense of Touch

Greater Glasgow and Clyde



This series of Sensory Questionnaires are designed to enable you to check your child's progress at particular stages of development.

YOUR SENSE OF TOUCH

We experience touch all the time. Our clothes touch us, when we sit our bodies are in contact with the chair, when we stand our feet are touching either the inside of our socks and shoes or are in direct contact with the ground. We can never escape touch!!

Some children can be very sensitive to touch; disliking certain textures or being very aware of the labels and seams inside clothing. Other children seem oblivious to touch and don't notice when their shoes are two sizes too small or don't feel pain like the rest of us.

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Question 1 - Tactile (12 - 18 Years)

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Do you dislike being messy and avoid having dirty or sticky hands etc.?

*Do you become distressed if you get food or paint on your hands?
Do you think you wash your hands more often than other teenagers?*



Strategies and Suggestions

If you are particularly sensitive to touch then the thought of putting your hands in something that is soft, slimy, sticky or gritty can be pretty awful. Taking part in home economics or art and design can be a challenge if you are worried about getting butter and flour or glue and clay on your fingers. Try the following tactics to make life easier:

- Before you touch anything try rubbing your hands together firmly using lots of deep pressure. This can help prepare your hands for the new texture as well as desensitise them to the touch experience.
- Have paper towels or wet wipes close by so that once you have completed the activity you can quickly clean your hands.



- Persevere with touching things you don't particularly like as your brain will become more used to the sensation and will react less each time.



Question 2 - Tactile (12 - 18 Years)

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Do you feel uncomfortable when you wash, brush or cut your hair? Do you dislike getting your fingernails or toenails cut?

Whilst it can be quite normal for pre-schoolers to complain when their faces are washed or their hair is being cut or brushed, most children can tolerate these activities by the time they are established in primary school. If you are still struggling with these everyday tasks in secondary school then answer 'yes' to this question.



Strategies and Suggestions

If you are sensitive to any of these personal care tasks you need to consider what it is you find so uncomfortable and what you could change to make the task easier. Everybody needs to look after their bodies and these are tasks that you **NEED** to undertake. Try the following suggestions to see if they help:

- Is it easier to wash your hair while having a bath or a shower? Choose whichever you prefer and stick to it.
- Are you sensitive to the fragrance of shampoo? If so try a non-scented shampoo.
- When washing your hair use deep pressure as you massage in the shampoo.
- Consider using dry shampoo between washes when hair washing is a challenge; this will reduce the number of times you actually have to wash your hair.
- A short haircut is easier to maintain if you don't like hair washing very much.
- If hair cutting is an issue try a deep pressure massage to your head before a haircut begins.





Question 2 - Tactile (12 - 18 Years)

- Ask the hair dresser to put several of the weighted rubber cutting collars around your shoulders as the additional weight provides deep pressure (proprioceptive input) and can help you relax.
- Try listening to your favourite music while having a haircut.
- Use a firm stroke or pressure as you comb or brush your hair.
- Experiment with different brushes and combs until you find the one that is most comfortable for you.
- Try an Indian head massager.
- Ideally cutting finger/toenails should be done after a bath when the nails are soft
- Prior to cutting your nails massage your hands with coconut oil or shea butter as this will also soften the nails.
- Instead of cutting the nails try using an emery board and filing them down to size.



If you are the parent of a teenager who struggles with these personal care tasks try using visual aids and social stories to increase understanding of the task. There are several examples provided on the site (look under 'life skills' and then in the ['looking after my body'](#) section) which you can download.



Question 3 - Tactile (12 - 18 Years)

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Do you not like unexpected touch e.g. when people bump into you as you are moving around, or when you are standing in a queue?

Young people who are sensitive to touch tend to react negatively to other people entering their 'personal space'. This can mean that you may feel like you want to lash out if the person standing next to you touches you by accident. This can make standing in the dinner queue or lining up to buy cinema tickets a challenge.



Strategies and Suggestions

- Ask your parent or teacher to explain to others (family, friends etc.) that you feel unexpected or light touch more strongly than they do, and that you can perceive it to be painful.
- Work with your parent or teacher and learn how to explain your sensory needs to others; together try to find the words to explain your need for personal space.
- Avoid situations where you are going to experience unexpected or light touch.
- Try having an object to fidget with and keep your hands busy (e.g. squeeze ball, blu tac) when you are moving around in spaces where touch may be an issue. Focusing on the object in your hands can make standing in a queue easier.
- Wearing a back pack, snug fitting clothing, or even a heavy coat can make you less sensitive to others brushing past you by mistake.
- Create a calming bag with items that can help you calm your sensory system during challenging situations. Include items such as chewing gum or a hard sweet to suck, a squeeze ball, and a tissue sprinkled with calming essential oils etc. all of which you can easily reach when you begin to feel stressed.





Question 5 - Tactile (12 - 18 Years)

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Do you dislike the feel of some fabrics and avoid wearing certain clothes e.g. jeans. Do you also find clothes labels uncomfortable?

Disliking certain textures is perfectly normal, however if it prevents you from wearing your school uniform, or makes you refuse to wear new clothes, this can be an issue. Some teenagers only like certain bedding because the feel of other sheets against their skin is uncomfortable. If you are someone who struggles with the sensation of certain fabrics against your skin then answer 'yes' to this question.



Strategies and Suggestions

Some people can be very sensitive to the feeling of different textures against their skin. This can be a challenge if there are certain clothes you HAVE to wear such as school uniform or a particular sports kit. Try the following strategies to help:

- Remove clothing tags and labels from inside your clothes. Be careful not to just cut them off as sometimes the cut edge can be just as irritating as the label itself. Try to remove them by unpicking the stitching that holds the label on.
- Wash new clothing to take out the stiffness prior to wearing for the first time.
- Try using detergent for sensitive skins (natural detergents may be preferable to ones with chemicals).
- Wear tight fitting clothing for subtle deep pressure input under regular clothes i.e. lycra biking shorts, compression shorts, under-armour etc.
- Try seamless socks and underwear.
- Giving yourself additional tactile input to your skin can help reduce your sensitivity to touch. Try doing this through hand massage, using an exfoliating scrub or gloves in the bath/shower, rubbing yourself dry using a rough towel, massaging in a moisturising lotion after your bath/shower etc.





Question 5 - Tactile (12 - 18 Years)

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Do you dislike going barefoot?

The soles of our feet can be quite sensitive, hence the reason some of us hate having our feet touched or have very tickly soles!

If you have sensitive feet you will likely have reacted badly as an infant to being stood barefoot on the grass or in sand. Whilst most children outgrow this by the time they start school others are left still feeling uncomfortable if they don't have some kind of covering on their feet.



Strategies and Suggestions

Your feet can be particularly sensitive to touch, which is why some people have such tickly feet! If you really struggle to go barefoot try the following hints:

- Give your feet a really good deep pressure massage before you put them on the ground. This helps desensitise them to touch and allows them to cope better with the sensation of the floor or grass etc.
- Get into the habit of giving your feet a good rub down when you come out of the bath or shower and spend a couple of minutes rubbing in foot lotion.
- Wear comfortable socks. Try wearing seamless socks or even turn the socks inside out so that the seams are not rubbing against your toes.
- As a parent or carer of a teen who is sensitive to touch, bear in mind if asking them to change for PE or get ready to participate in certain activities that they may not like having their socks and shoes off and this may cause them to become irritable.





Question 6 - Tactile (12 - 18 Years)

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Do you have a high tolerance to pain and don't seem to react as expected after having an accident e.g. cut or injured yourself?

Most people are very aware of painful touch, and indeed some seem to over-react to it. Others however seem to not notice if they have hurt themselves and may not respond at all. If you don't seem to feel pain the same way as your friends or siblings then answer 'yes' here.



Strategies and Suggestions

Not everybody experiences pain in the same way. Some people completely over-react to a paper cut whilst others can have broken an arm and barely register the pain. If you have a very high threshold to pain you may not even be aware that you have hurt yourself.

- If you do have a high threshold to pain then it is worth making sure your parent or teacher knows if you have injured yourself. You may not feel sore but it is worth letting an adult check the injury so they can decide if it needs further intervention.
- You can train your body to experience all kinds of sensation better by increasing your exposure to deep and light touch. Hugs, light and firm massage etc. will all improve your awareness of touch.



As a parent or teacher of a teenager who has a high tolerance to pain, if their behaviour has changed suddenly please think about whether this may be due to an unseen injury.



Question 7 - Tactile (12 - 18 Years)

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When you are getting dressing are you unaware that your clothes are twisted on your body? Do you not realise when your trousers/skirts are slipped down?

Whilst most of us might be irritated by the feeling of twisted clothing against our skin, some people who don't feel touch as well as they should can be happily unaware! They may spend an entire day with their shoes on the wrong feet or their sweatshirt on back to front so that the collar is sitting across the throat, and be none the wiser. If this describes you then answer 'yes' here.



Strategies and Suggestions

If you don't seem to feel touch as well as others then you may be oblivious to the fact that your sleeves are all twisted and the seam spirals up your arm, or that your shirt collar is tucked in on one side and pointing up your neck on the other. Whilst it may not bother you, your parent probably gets annoyed at the state of your appearance!

- Make sure you get dressed whilst standing in front of a mirror; this will enable you to fix things as you go along. Check in the mirror again as you leave for school just to make sure your collar is folded down and your tie is straight. This is not to encourage vanity but if your sense of touch isn't working as well as it should you need to use your sense of vision to support it. Try to do this every morning until it becomes a regular part of your daily routine.





Question 8 - Tactile (12 - 18 Years)

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Do you dislike certain food textures such as peaches, stews or chunky soups etc.?

People can have a very restricted diet for a variety of reasons. If you choose to only eat certain textures e.g. soft or crunchy, or temperatures e.g. warm or cold, then this is because you are sensitive to touch (or the way something feels) inside your mouth and you should answer 'yes' to this question. If you only like spicy or sweet foods then this isn't about touch but is more about taste and you should answer 'no'.



Strategies and Suggestions

As you get older it becomes more and more important that you eat a wide variety of foods. If you have a very limited diet try introducing new foods by expanding one sensory characteristic at a time. For example if you can eat yoghurt without a problem try mixing in some Rice Krispies to give it a crunchy texture, or adding in some finely chopped peach slices or roughly mashed banana to give it a more lumpy texture. If you can manage crunchy things no problem but don't like sauces etc. try dipping your chips (or the crunchy food you can eat) into a tiny amount of the sauce and eating that. Always have a preferred taste waiting so that once you have tried the food you don't like you can 'reward' yourself with a flavour you love.

