



Tactile Skills for Braille Readers

Developing young braille readers' tactile hand and finger skills early and continuously is important. Building a strong foundation of tactile exploration supports the development of skills necessary for reading braille as well as interpreting tactile pictures and diagrams.

First-hand experience with a rich variety of real objects and textures is important.

Grasping and manipulating objects develops muscle strength in hands, fingers and arms and will help build skills for identifying and recognising objects, and learning different ways objects can be used.

WESSST is a useful tool for directing your child's attention to the various properties, or qualities of an object.

It is not necessary to follow the WESSST structure formally. There is no one way to carry out a WESSST exploration!

To begin with, you may be sitting alongside your child **describing how you are using your hands and fingers** to explore an object in different ways. For example, explore using your hands and or finger tips to scratch, rub, poke, tap and move your hand across the surface of an object.

Compare the object qualities (e.g. size) to something that the child may already know can help them make connections. For example, this knobbly ball is as big as an orange, the chair is as high as my waist, the metal wrench is as long as my forearm. This is a great opportunity for you to observe and let your child show you what they know.

Try to avoid directing or asking your child to explore in a particular way.

Instead, try using the **Sentence Starters** below to invite your child to explore. This puts them in charge of their own learning, ensures that they are gathering information that is relevant and meaningful to them.

Remember that your child's ability to describe an object may come later and at this stage is not as important as being able to explore the object tactually.

Some children may be sensitive to certain textures. Pay attention to likes and dislikes. What may be motivating for some may be scary for others.

Have fun! This is an important skill for life-long learning.



- W** = Weight - How heavy? Is it lighter or heavier than another object?
- E** = Ends & Edges - Edges—sharp or not, Corners —sharp or not, Sides—flat or curved
- S** = Size - How big, wide, tall, long, flat - compare to self, object
- S** = Shape - Like a box, car, dog...
- S** = Sound - The sound it makes when tapped, shaken, dropped...
- T** = Texture - Smoothness, shiny, rough, bumpy

*Adapted from Brannock & Golding 2000

SENTENCE STARTERS

Sentence Starters encourage children to initiate exploration of objects and places.

I'm going to ... Modelling

I'm going to tap this object to see what sound it makes.

I'm going to check under this box to see if I can find an opening.

I'm stretching my hand and see if it can cover the whole ball.

I'm going to see what sound it makes when I scratch the surface of this nut.

I wonder... Inviting

I wonder if I can stretch my arms as long as this slinky?

I wonder what will happen if I push this ball down the slope?

If I hold this metal spoon against my cheek, I wonder if it will feel cold?

I wonder what will happen if I squeeze this toy cow?

If Jane wanted to ... Offering

If you wanted to you could push a ball down the ramp too.

If you wanted to you could check the other objects to see which one is the longest.

If we both held this rope, we could see if it reaches across the table.