



Using a texture / food play hierarchy

We can use Texture and Food Hierarchies to help us to identify what textures a child may enjoy engaging with and others that they cannot or will not tolerate.

It is important that texture hierarchies are not used as a means to get a child to tolerate something. Texture and Food Hierarchies are a tool to understand children with SEND more, and their sensory needs.

Start with the more widely tolerated textures for play, and if the child enjoys engaging with the suggestions, next time you can look at involving the next texture up!

TOP TIP:

Start with the Texture Hierarchy → Understanding a child's texture preferences may also help you determine which foods your child may like. Start with foods that fall under a more widely tolerated textures for play.

Messy Play Texture Hierarchy
A messy play texture hierarchy is a great way for children with SEND to learn more about textures, tastes and sensations. It can involve getting hands stuck into wet materials like foam, or dry materials like sand!

Important things to keep in mind:
1. Mark your way up the hierarchy, from easy to challenging.
2. Always move at the child's pace, giving them control of the level they are at and what they would like to explore.
3. Never force a child to touch something they are uncomfortable with, always respect sensory differences.

EASY	DRY	WET	CHALLENGING
Dry textures that fall away and the child can control contact with the texture. <input type="checkbox"/> Feathers <input type="checkbox"/> Shredded paper <input type="checkbox"/> Dry Pasta / spaghetti <input type="checkbox"/> Dry Rice <input type="checkbox"/> Dry porridge oats <input type="checkbox"/> String <input type="checkbox"/> Lace <input type="checkbox"/> Fabric squares <input type="checkbox"/> Fur fabric <input type="checkbox"/> Dry sand <input type="checkbox"/> Beads <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic items <input type="checkbox"/> Sea shells <input type="checkbox"/> Coconut husks <input type="checkbox"/> Dry lentils / beans <input type="checkbox"/> Dried flowers <input type="checkbox"/> Hay / straw <input type="checkbox"/> Leaves <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton wool	Dry textures that mostly fall away, some particles or bits may stick to your hands. <input type="checkbox"/> Damp Sand <input type="checkbox"/> Glitter <input type="checkbox"/> Sequins <input type="checkbox"/> Touching mixture of corn flour mixed with water <input type="checkbox"/> Cold wet pasta / spaghetti <input type="checkbox"/> Wet rice <input type="checkbox"/> Silly string <input type="checkbox"/> Chalks <input type="checkbox"/> Playdough <input type="checkbox"/> Compost	Wet textures that stick to the hand but the child can easily break contact with the texture (e.g. by lightly wrung). <input type="checkbox"/> Foam (e.g. light shaving foam) <input type="checkbox"/> Water <input type="checkbox"/> Wet sand <input type="checkbox"/> Wet noodles <input type="checkbox"/> Wet lentils <input type="checkbox"/> Baked beans <input type="checkbox"/> Jelly <input type="checkbox"/> Mashed potato <input type="checkbox"/> Ice cubes	Wet textures that stick to the hand and the child has least control when breaking contact with the texture (e.g. by repeatedly wrung). <input type="checkbox"/> Foam (e.g. heavy shaving foam) <input type="checkbox"/> Glue <input type="checkbox"/> Melted chocolate <input type="checkbox"/> Mashed banana <input type="checkbox"/> Drizzling mixture of corn flour mixed with water on the skin <input type="checkbox"/> Mud <input type="checkbox"/> Angel delight <input type="checkbox"/> Porridge <input type="checkbox"/> Custard <input type="checkbox"/> Yoghurt <input type="checkbox"/> Ice cream <input type="checkbox"/> Finger Paint / poster paint <input type="checkbox"/> Tinned Spaghetti

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If you get to a texture that the child does not engage with or seem to enjoy, this is where you stop.

The hierarchy will then show you what sort of textures they like and enjoy, and what textures they do not like to interact with.

It is important to give children the opportunity to access new textures and foods with no pressure to interact with them. By combining textures a child may like with textures you don't know they will engage with gives the child the opportunity to explore that their own pace.

Never force a child to engage with sensory play or new textures. Always allow them to engage at their own pace or not at all.

It's also important to remember that having access to the same sensory play and foods over multiple occasions will allow the child to engage not just at their own pace, but in a way that works for them. Just because they aren't engaging with the item one day or how you might expect, doesn't mean that they aren't aware of it and engaging with it in their own way.

Remember safety always and the needs of your child, always supervise to prevent choking or ingestion of sensory items. Tailor what you offer to the needs of your child developmentally.

We can promote inclusion by having hand washing water, paper towels or wet wipes next to the sensory play. We can also offer tools like a wooden spoon to explore it with, or even gloves. Having control and autonomy over what your child touches is really important.

Share vocabulary around the different experiences visually and verbally yourself - "oh this is sticky, I'm going to wash my hands", model that it's OK to love some things and hate the others and to clean it off your hands! Have visual communication boards available around the play.

Remember, with sensory processing differences that some experiences can be deeply uncomfortable or even painful. We cannot desensitise someone to the way their body feels their sensory input. If we minimise it enough, we can make them believe they need to tolerate it regardless of how uncomfortable it is and this can lead to many problems down the line for that child. It is distressing to have to access inappropriate sensory environments repeatedly with no support.



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EASY

Dry textures that fall away and the child can control contact with the texture

START HERE:

- Feathers
- Shredded paper
- Dry Pasta / spaghetti
- Dry Rice
- Dry porridge oats
- String
- Lace
- Fabric squares
- Fur fabric
- Dry sand
- Beads
- Plastic items
- Sea shells
- Coconut husks
- Dry lentils / beans
- Dried flowers
- Hay / straw
- Leaves
- Cotton wool

Dry textures that mostly fall away, some particles or bits may stick to your hands.

- Damp Sand
- Glitter
- Sequins
- Touching mixture of corn flour mixed with water
- Cold wet pasta / spaghetti
- Wet rice
- Silly string
- Chalks
- Playdough
- Compost

Wet textures that stick to the hand but the child can easily break contact with the texture (e.g. by lightly wiping)

- Foam (e.g. light shaving foam)
- Water
- Wet sand
- Wet noodles
- Wet lentils
- Baked beans
- Jelly
- Mashed potato
- Ice cubes

CHALLENGING

Wet textures that stick to the hand and the child has least control when breaking contact with the texture (e.g. by repeatedly wiping).

- Foam (e.g. heavy shaving foam)
- Glue
- Melted chocolate
- Mashed banana
- Dripping mixture of corn flour mixed with water on the skin
- Mud
- Angel delight
- Porridge
- Custard
- Yoghurt
- Ice cream
- Finger Paint / poster paint
- Tinned Spaghetti

Items at this end of the scale could include additional properties such as wet, sticky or cold.





Food Play Texture Hierarchy

Food play gives children the opportunity to engage and interact with food items without the pressure of a meal time or expectation to eat. Using a sensory play & food texture hierarchy allows you to see what textures they enjoy and can tolerate, and those that they don't like, which can guide you with what new foods to try with your child.

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EASY

CHALLENGING

FIRM & DRY:

Dry textures that fall away and the child can control contact with the texture.

No brushing or wiping is required.

START HERE:

- Marzipan
- Ready roll icing
- Broken pancakes
- Cereals - cornflakes, rice krispies, cocoa pops etc.
- Uncooked noodles (hard)
- Raw vegetables (either whole or in chunks - but dry!)
- Liquorice
- Snack foods - skips, wotsits

SOFT & DRY:

Dry textures that mostly fall away, some particles or bits may stick to your hands.

Brushing residue is required to break contact.

- Icing sugar
- Cocoa powder
- Dry angel delight mix
- Dry porridge oats
- Granulated sugar
- Sherbert
- Cake decorations e.g. hundreds and thousands, strands etc.

WET:

Wet textures that stick to the hand but the child can easily break contact with the texture.

Requires wiping to break contact with the texture.

- Water
- Cooked noodles
- Cooked lentils
- Cooked pasta / spaghetti
- Cooked rice
- Jelly
- Mashed potato
- Ice cubes
- Piping icing
- Custard
- Yoghurt
- Baked beans
- Puréed fruit and vegetables

WET & STICKY:

Wet textures that stick to the hand and the child has least control when breaking contact with the texture.

Requires repeated wiping to break residue away.

- Melted chocolate
- Mashed banana
- Angel delight
- Porridge
- Ice cream
- Tinned spaghetti
- Chocolate spread
- Jam, lemon curd etc.
- Ketchup
- Sweet and sour sauce

Items at this end of the scale could include additional properties such as wet, sticky or cold.

