

## Sensory Processing: My Child puts EVERYTHING in their mouth!!



I often receive the question from parents and teachers as to why their students are constantly putting things in their mouths. It may be their fingers, sucking on sleeves, constantly chewing on their pencils, etc. There could be a variety of reasons a child may be mouthing items, but often they are doing it to fulfill a “need” for sensory stimulation or to calm/regulate themselves. As adults, we often do the same thing, but most of us have learned to do it in what we feel is an appropriate way. You may be a person who is constantly chewing on ice, has to have gum, always drinking something, snacking when you are bored, using food to “comfort” yourself, biting your nails, chewing on your lips, constantly putting on chap stick, etc. If a child feels the need to chew or mouth items, it is important to not scold them for it, but instead give them appropriate opportunities for the stimulation. A “chewy box” or bag of oral stimulating activities can be made as a tool for your child to choose activities. Some examples of what can be put in this box are crunchy or chewy foods, gum, bubbles, sour spray, a chewy tube, straws, pin wheels, etc.) **Here is an example of a daily routine that can be used to help decrease inappropriate mouthing behaviors:**

### Daily Routine:

- Brush Teeth with a vibrating toothbrush. Have your child touch it to their lips, give it 10 kisses, touch it to the insides of their cheeks, etc.
- For Breakfast include a crunchy or chewy food (for example a granola bar or an apple)
- On the way to school let your child pick an appropriate activity out of their “chewy box” (Blowing a pin wheel, chewing a piece of gum, chewing on a “chewy tube”)
- Pack your child a lunch with a variety of cold, crunchy, chewy, or sour foods. (Crunchy peanut butter sandwich, carrot sticks, fruit snacks, beef jerky, pretzel sticks, apple, sour piece of candy, etc)
- After school have your child pick something out of their “chewing box”. This would be a good time to blow bubbles, use straws to blow cotton balls and have cotton ball races, blow on a pinwheel, blow a whistle, use their “chewy tube”, etc.
- If your child eats an afterschool snack include a sensory rich food (frozen go-gurts, apples, carrots, pop cycles, drinking something thick through a straw, anything else crunchy or chewy)
- Dinner time, again, provide a variety of textures.
- Bed time, brush teeth again with a vibrating toothbrush, let your child chew on their chewy tube while they are being read a bedtime story.

It is also important to keep in close contact with your child’s teacher. If your child is chewing inappropriate items at school, there are adaptations that can be made to their classroom routine (for example having a chewy pencil topper or a chewy tube at their desk). Sensory activities should be tailored to **your specific child** and their needs. When you notice a child mouthing an object, simply offer them an appropriate substitute.

Eventually the goal is for the child to be able to regulate themselves, and to be able choose an acceptable replacement. If you have any questions feel free to contact your school occupational therapist:



Name:

E-mail: