

# Tickling

Tickling can be described as, “a gentle stimulation of the surface skin that produces pleasurable reflexes” [1]. This is a form of play, even though the sensation is often not enjoyed by the one it is being performed on [3,4]. Fingers are used by the tickler to stimulate vulnerable areas on the ticklee [2]. The product of tickling is often laughter, even though the ticklee fights to get away from the tickler, because the stimulus is less than pleasant [2,3]. Tickling is a form of play that can create a bond between two people, such as parents and children, potential romantic partners, or friends, and is most effective if performed as an act of surprise, by someone the ticklee knows, and if the tickler respects the bounds that the ticklee sets in regards to stopping and over stimulation [2,3,4].

Tickling is a form of locomotor-rotational play because it involves movements of the body—both the ticklers movements and the ticklee’s attempts to stop the tickler. Without these actions tickling as play would not be possible [4]. Tickling is also a form of social play because it requires two people and the interaction between these two people to be play [2, 4].

The cost to this play can be serious. The risk of injury is present. Tickling’s movements are so imprecise, spontaneous, unpredictable, and unrehearsed that it is possible for both tickler and ticklee to be wounded by falling, running into an object, or by accidentally hitting, punching, or kicking their partner. The risk of bodily beatings is probably not so severe that it is a reason to stop tickling play; the true risk comes from the social aspect of tickling play. Tickling is causing discomfort to another human being [2,3]. Different thresholds will be present for the toleration of the ticklish sensation and of physical contact [2]. The tickler must either be aware of the ticklee’s thresholds or be willing to stop when asked or asked repeatedly or seriously by the ticklee. If not, the tickler risks offending or angering the ticklee; in that way, a social bond can be broken. If the ticklee cannot trust the tickler to stop when they are asked to, the ticklee might not want to interact socially with the tickler. Because the comfort of the ticklee can become so severely compromised, it is safe to say that play stops when things go too far in tickling [2].

The benefits of tickling come with a greater social bond with another human being. Tickling is about trust. Most obviously, it is about the one being tickled knowing that they can count on the one tickling them to stop, if asked, and not cause them a severe amount of physical discomfort. The one doing the tickling, the tickler, also must trust that the person they are about to tickle will not react severely and unexpectedly (like by punching them), if they go to tickle them. The ticklee’s other benefit comes from by defending their vulnerable areas. Tickling is most often done to the chest, abdomen, feet, and neck, vulnerable areas for a human [2]. Ticklish spots could have evolved from this vulnerability; they are the ones most in need of protection [2]. If one can defend them from a tickler, they get practice defending them from more serious attacks [2]. As the way one can learn to defend themselves from tickling is limited (they cannot defend against gunshots or knives or other serious attacks with weapons), it is probable that the greatest benefit from tickling is the social bonding it creates. It allows parents a way to play with children, couples to be flirtatious without being overt [3], and friends to grow closer [2,3].



## Works Cited

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