

## Children's Occupational Therapy Service

### Strategies for Bathing, Hair Washing/ Cutting/ Brushing, Nail Cutting and Dressing for individuals with sensitivity to tactile sensation

#### Bathing/Hair Washing

- In preparation and prior to bathing/hair washing provide your child with deep pressure either by wrapping firmly in a towel and giving a squeeze hug or squishing between your knees.
- Use a firm stroke or pressure as you wash hair. Water poured from a jug may be more tolerable than tickly spray from a shower. You could try using a heavy flannel or mitt to wet and rinse hair.
- A rinse cup may be helpful. The edge makes a watertight seal at the forehead so no water will fall over the face and reduces the amount of water that passes over the ears.
- You can also buy a rinse shield that helps to keep shampoo and water out of a child's eyes and it is placed over the child's ears.
- Ask the child to count as you wash
- Use distraction techniques in the bath e.g. by singing songs or playing with bath toys such as a doll for your child to wash its hair at the same time.
- Give definite time limits to the child e.g. "lets count to ten then we will stop".
- Once out of the bath, wrap up in a large soft towel tightly to provide total body deep pressure and praise your child.
- Encourage the child to use various sponges, washcloths and body buff puffs in the bath. Encourage firm pressure on their body.
- For the days where it has not been possible to wash your child's hair, try using a dry shampoo e.g. Batiste. This can be sprayed onto hair and rubbed/massaged in using firm pressure rather than light touch. Hair will look like it's just been washed and will smell nice.

Easy pour shampoo rinse cup: Edge makes a watertight seal at the forehead so no water will fall over the face, and reduces the amount of water that passes over the ears. For example from Mothercare and Boots Shampoo eye shield: Placed over the ears to help keep shampoo and water out of eyes. For example from Tesco.

#### Cutting Hair

- The child should be as relaxed as possible
- Try relaxing music, slow rhythmical
- A hairdresser who will visit you at home allowing your child to be in familiar surroundings may be helpful. This would also allow your child to watch their favourite TV programme or DVD whilst having their hair cut
- Try wrapping your child's body firmly in a warm towel or lycra wrap (leaving their hands free) whilst cutting their hair
- Give definite time limits to the child e.g. "lets count to ten then we will stop" and allow short breaks between cutting and/or ask the child to count as you cut
- Try to avoid, as far as possible hair falling down the child's face and getting into clothes
- Plan a bath or shower (if preferred) afterwards to get rid of any tickly hair
- Try cutting hair when it is wet or damp rather than dry and tickly

- Use a mirror so the child can see what is going on and what is about to happen
- Involve the child in the activity explaining what is happening and not approaching with scissors from behind
- If the child has a shorter hairstyle they may prefer the use of clippers due to the noise and vibration rather than scissors/ or vice versa

### **Brushing Hair**

- Be aware that your child may be registering the sensation of having their hair brushed as painful or unpleasant.
- A vibrating hairbrush and/or some firm pressure activities prior to hair brushing may help them tolerate the sensation.
- Allow your child to judge the amount of pressure that is applied to the head when brushing hair by brushing hair independently.
- Use a leave in conditioner to reduce the amount of tugs in the hair, which can be bought in a spray form that can be applied to wet hair.
- Plait long hair before going to bed as this should reduce the amount of tugs that there are in the morning.

### **Cutting Nails**

- This should be done when the nails are soft e.g. after a bath or water play
- Try firm pressure techniques to give your child a calming sensation whilst their nails are being cut
- Try massaging your child's hand / feet with hand or foot cream prior to cutting their nails.
- Try wrapping your child's body firmly in a warm towel or lycra wrap (leaving their hands / feet free) whilst cutting their nails

### **Dressing**

Your child may be sensitive to certain fabrics e.g. is particular about certain clothes or dislike new clothes. You could try:

- Making a note of the clothes your child will wear and will not wear and their preference. Are there particular fabrics they dislike e.g. velour, corduroy? Does the texture and weight of items matter? Is it easier to tolerate clothes if they are looser or tighter? Do the items have to be a certain colour or be minimal in pattern/design? Do the seams or labels bother them?
- Ask your child to try and explain how the clothes feel e.g. sore, scratchy.
- Warm up clothes on the radiator or in a tumble dryer before putting on.
- Wash new clothes with regular laundry before attempting to put on your child to ensure they smell just like their own clothes.
- Have new clothes in sight as much as possible e.g. draped over chair, on kitchen worktop, on bedroom floor. The more they see the new item the more familiar they will be with them.
- Wear something old under a new item e.g. an old t-shirt then their new jumper.
- Provide a sense of control to your child about what they are going to wear, by offering them a choice out of two new items.
- They may wear a brand new item of clothing if it has a reference to something they really like e.g. Lego or Star Wars?
- Search for 'sensory friendly' clothing such as the range from Marks and Spencer's clothes for children with autism.

If your child dislikes **undressing**, provide firm pressure before clothes are removed, and wrap your child firmly in a blanket to provide firm pressure once they are undressed. Sometimes it's helpful to let them take their clothes off under the covers on their bed.

Your child may become irritated by **shoes or socks** or avoid wearing them. You could:

- Wear 'Crocs' instead of trainers or socks and shoes.
- Go barefoot when shoes are not needed to be worn e.g. at home.
- Try *seamless socks* if your child appears to dislike wearing socks as they may be irritated by the toe seam.
- Turn socks inside out.
- Buy socks with favourite characters on them.
- If the sensation of socks falling down is annoying try little sock garters.

### Seamless socks

Available from:

- [www.happysocks.com](http://www.happysocks.com)
- [www.sensorysmart.co.uk](http://www.sensorysmart.co.uk) (also has a tips page for wearing socks!)
- [www.fledglings.org.uk](http://www.fledglings.org.uk)
- [www.eczemaclighting.com](http://www.eczemaclighting.com)