



## Hair Care

We all interpret information from the environment around us in different ways. Some people find certain types of input more distressing or distracting than others e.g. touch (tactile input). This discomfort may be particularly present with light touch on the skin, for example from a shower spray or being tickled. Unexpected sensory experiences of any kind are also threatening e.g. touching someone from behind or a tickly spider landing on ones arm. **The head is particularly sensitive to touch**, which can make hair cutting/brushing an uncomfortable and sometimes distressing experience.



Touch is a primary and basic sensory system, so when children are sensitive to touch they may react negatively to touch input by screaming, crying or hitting back. This is because the nervous system is interpreting the stimulus as threatening - potentially harmful or dangerous.

It is possible to prepare your child for sensations that they may find threatening; this should help to reduce their response and with time hopefully they will increase their tolerance of difficult tactile situations, and learn strategies to cope with these activities better, **although their bodies will continue to interpret them as something they do not like**. Not all the strategies below will work for one person so experiment and adapt according to your child. You may already be doing some of these, if they are working, keep going!

### STRATEGIES TO TRY TO ASSIST WITH HAIRCUTTING

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- Where possible, avoid light touch. Always touch your child gently but firmly, and approach from a direction where they can see you coming. A mirror can be useful as your child can see what is happening.



- Always touch on the child's terms – when they can trust that you are listening to them and responding they are more likely to let you be more involved next time. Touching yourself is less threatening so where possible involve your child, encourage them to stroke through or brush through their hair to get it ready for cutting.



- If the **sound** and feel of the clippers causes too much distress then it may be more appropriate to use scissors instead.



- You could try using child-friendly scissors with your child, to cut up paper at home. This may help them become familiar with the use of scissors and reduce any anxiety which is caused by the sight of scissors.



- The use of earphones or a personal stereo with your child's favourite music may help to keep them calmer. This can help to shut out background noise which may annoy them.



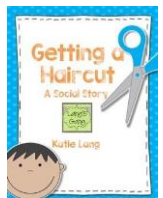
- Reduce too much **visually** stimulating input eg busy wall displays, cluttered room, bright lights, and bright sunshine. Dim lights and reduce sound to create a calm atmosphere. Use simple visual input to support eg if your child responds to visual timetables, it may be useful to use a haircut symbol on a calendar, so that he is aware of when it will be taking place. By using a timer, you could visually show him when the hair cut starts and finishes. Some children may respond well to a series of sequencing picture cards eg 1. Picture of child sitting

2. Picture of fringe being trimmed 3. Picture of hair being trimmed 4. Picture of smiling child – hair cut finished

- Some parents have found that the haircut is made easier by hugging their child in their lap. This can provide gentle pressure which may have a calming effect for the child and reduce anxiety whilst having a haircut. Other similar strategies which give similar input could be sitting in a large squishy bean bag, or using a weighted lap pad on their lap to provide a calm position, some parents use wheat bags around the child's shoulder which provides the same input.



- Deep pressure applied to your child's head before beginning the hair cut can be used to help prepare them – firstly encourage them to link their fingers and place their linked hands on top of their head, gently squeezing towards the front and back of the head, then move on to using the fingertips to rub the head.
- If your child reacts defensively to tactile situations then prior to hair cutting prepare them verbally and visually for the activity eg social story or video or hair cutting.
- Grade the activity – start with trimming their fringe and then reward. Next time perhaps trim fringe and a minimal trim all over. Praise and reward after.
- Encourage your child to engage in an activity that provides deep pressure through their legs or hands whilst they are sitting in the hairdresser's chair. Encourage your child to squeeze a 'stress' ball or theraputty with their hands whilst they are having their hair cut and see if this works. Some children may respond well to having extra weight such as a weighted lap pad or weighted soft toy to hold in their lap whilst sitting for a haircut.



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- Give definite time limits to the task; for example say ‘we will count down from 10 then and then we will stop cutting’.



- Air blow away all bits of hair after cutting to avoid irritation on skin.
- Allow your child to fidget with a toy or squeeze a small ball etc whilst they are having their hair cut. Playdough or theraputty or a squeezey ball will provide muscle work for the hands which will have a calming effect.



### **STRATEGIES TO TRY TO ASSIST WITH HAIR BRUSHING**

- Again, this will be more easily tolerated when your child can predict what will be happening to them so, if possible encourage them to complete as much of the task themselves as possible.



- Introduce a mirror so that these can see what they are doing.
- Consider positioning – sitting in a stable position may give your child a calmer starting point for the activity.



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- Consider the type of brush most suitable for your child's hair – 'Tangle Teaser' or similar are a popular choice with children as they tend to pull less, but experiment as all children will have different hair and different preferences.



- Setting up the environment so that they feel calm prior to beginning the task is important. It is helpful to think of the areas of sensory processing like buckets or containers – we can only fill them so full before they start overflowing. If your child is in an environment with a lot of noise and lights and unexpected movement then adding a task that is challenging for their sensory systems such as hair brushing at this time may not work well; they will feel overwhelmed and find an extra challenge to their sensory processing difficult to cope with.
- Encourage your child to practice brushing your hair – they will see your calm response as well as practice the technique.



Hair brushing for long hair especially is often easier when wet and with lots of conditioner, so save for bath/shower time.

1. Wet hair
2. Shampoo hair
3. Rinse
4. Apply generous amount of conditioner
5. Brush through with 'Tangle Teezer' or similar, teach child to begin brush at the ends and work up to the head/roots
6. Rinse



Keeping your child's hair short makes hair washing/rinsing much easier

- Using dry shampoo (available from pharmacies and supermarkets) between hair washes can reduce the frequency that you need to wash your child's hair.
- If your child's hair is short, a wet flannel or sponge may be enough to



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wet and then rinse your child's hair.

- Try using a flannel or small towel held over eyes and face (encourage your child to hold the flannel themselves ) or even try goggles or a snorkel mask.



- Experiment with shower versus the bath. If you have a shower over the bath try taking the detachable hose off the hook and using it on a low pressure setting to rinse your child's hair. (Higher pressure through the shower with produce a more 'tickly' effect on the scalp).



- Try using a jug or water cupped in your hands to wet and rinse your child's hair.



- Experiment with unscented shampoo/conditioner if you feel this is something you child may be sensitive to.
- Preparing your child for the task is important and using visual supports for hair washing can help many children. Use a picture to represent the hair washing with a picture to represent a preferred activity such as snack or TV. Explain to your child that first they will have their hair washed, then they can have their snack.



NOW

THEN

- You could try washing your child's hair over the sink or a basin some children can tolerate leaning forward to wet their hair better than lying down in the bath with their head back.
- If you think your child is reluctant to lie back in the bath this may be because they feel less stable so ensure they are appropriately supported (by placing your arm behind to support their head/shoulders) and have a non-slip mat to provide a more stable surface.



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- Don't forget to talk to your child about what it is they don't like about what they dislike about hair washing - it may be fear be fear of getting water in their eyes, a dislike of the feeling of wet hair, the scent of the shampoo, if you are able to, problem solve together.



- As mentioned previously, children are more tolerant of sensations when they are in control of them so continue to encourage your child to become involved and gradually develop their independence in washing their own hair.

