

Sensory Strategies to Support Personal Care Tasks:

Prior to Activities

Before the child participates in personal care tasks they find difficult, they may benefit from engaging in calming proprioceptive or deep pressure activities. Proprioceptive sensory input is generated from the movement of a person's muscles and joints, particularly when they are working against resistance. Participation in proprioceptive-rich activities is shown to have a direct, positive impact on emotional wellbeing and can help a child to maintain a calm and alert state. Example activities include: massage, use of a weighted blanket, bouncing on a gym ball, being wrapped up tightly in a blanket or a piece of stretchy lycra fabric or playing tug of war with a stretchy piece of elastic.

Teeth Brushing

- Massaging or brushing the lips and jaw with a dry facecloth or soft brush may help to de-sensitise the area prior to teeth brushing.
- Use of a vibrating toothbrush around the lips and jaw area may also help to de-sensitise the area and improve tolerance of teeth brushing.
- Consider using warm vs. cold water or vice versa depending on preference.
- Have the child rinse their mouth with very cold water (provided there are no sensitivities) to help reduce the sensation of brushing.
- The child may prefer a 360-degree toothbrush as this may provide more tolerable, firmer pressure within his mouth, although this could prove over-stimulating.
- Try using a mild flavoured or unflavoured toothpaste such as Oranurse. Alternatively, instead of mint, try a fruit flavoured toothpaste.
- If the child dislikes the foaming sensation of toothpaste, check for toothpastes that don't have the ingredient Sodium Laurel Sulphate.
- For more toothpaste ideas try: <https://growingsmiles.co.uk/product-category/toothpastes/>
- Use a mirror to help the child predict the sensations.
- Use a visual timer or distract with music, countdowns or use of a toothbrushing App.

Nail Cutting

- Try cutting nails after bathing when they are softer or soak nails in warm water beforehand.
- Massaging or brushing the child's hands and fingers with a washcloth or soft brush may help to de-sensitise the area prior to nail cutting.
- Nail clippers vs nail scissors can be easier to tolerate. Alternatively, regular filing can eliminate the need for cutting, however this may also be difficult to tolerate.
- Encourage the child to cut their own nails as this may reduce their apprehension and enable them to better control the sensations.
- Providing a countdown until the activity is finished may also help support tolerance.

Hair Care

- Provide firm pressure / massage to the head before brushing, washing or cutting.
- When brushing, use consistent, predictable pressure in the same direction. If your child is sensitive to touch, use a brush with a large head.
- Be aware of scented hair products if your child is sensitive to smells. Encourage the child to choose their own hair products and allow her to smell them if possible.

- Try using a dry shampoo for the days in-between hair washes.
- If shampoo is the main issue, skip the shampoo. Wash with water and a conditioner and use dry shampoo.
- A solid shampoo or conditioner bar can be easier to manage and foam less than liquid products.
- Try a brush such as a [Tangle Teaser](#) or [Wet Brush](#).
- During cutting, use a good cape to block the bits of hair from falling under the clothing.
- Make touch predictable and count down the number of times you comb through the hair and the number of snips used.
- Try using earbuds to listen to music in order to block out the sound of hair clippers.
- Be mindful of the noise in the salon; you may need to go early or when the salon is closed if a quiet place is needed.
- Use a social story or video to show the entire event and help to prepare your child for what to expect.
- Use visual aids to increase understanding of the task.