

# HAIR CARE



Due to their sensory processing patterns, many Autistic children find it difficult to tolerate everyday self-care activities such as brushing hair. Here are a few things to try with your child which may ease their discomfort.

## Sensory Strategies

- If your child is sensitive to touch, use a brush with a large head. A soft bristled brush may be preferable.
- Vibrating hairbrushes are available. Some children find these easier to tolerate than standard hairbrushes as the vibration provides a calming deep touch pressure.
- When brushing or styling, use firm strokes or firm touch (firm pressure touch has a more organizing effect than light touch). For example, placing one hand firmly on the scalp and brushing or styling with the other hand.
- Use (firm touch) massage to the scalp prior to hair styling.
- Style hair in front of the mirror so that the young person can predict when the brush is coming.
- Consider other sensory stimuli within the environment (e.g. quiet, uncluttered environment where possible).
- Encourage the child to style their own hair to begin with – this will help them to get used to the sensation whilst they are in control.
- Sitting with a weight on the lap (e.g. weighted blanket or toy) may help individuals to tolerate hairstyling.

## Other Strategies

- Follow a set routine for hair styling – stick to this wherever possible (e.g. same room, same chair to sit in/calming music playing/reward when tolerated hair brushing/styling for set number of brush strokes).
- Give preferred toy/book to look at during hair care.
- Use a conditioner/tangle teezer comb to detangle as much as possible.
- With tangles, start at the bottom of the hair, holding just above the tangle and then work up to the root.
- Keep hair cut short.
- Prepare the child beforehand by telling them what you are going to do.
- Use visuals/timers as appropriate so that the child knows that/when the activity will end. For example: 'first hair then dvd'.
- Allow your child to brush and style a doll's hair.
- Try not to rush. Set aside time so there is less of a hurry and the activity can be more relaxed.

## Washing Hair

- Consider positioning (many children don't like to tip their head back so tipping head forward may be preferred);
- If using the bath, put toys in the bath to motivate and distract. E.g. some plastic cups or watering cans, water wheels, floating animals, musical and/or bubble toys;
- If child reacts negatively to the water going over their head, use a jug (likely to be easier to tolerate than shower head) and tell child how many jugs full you are going to use then doing a countdown (ideally with a visual to support this).
- Consider using a flannel to cover ears or an eye shield e.g. 'clippersafe shampoo shield' or 'dry eyes face shield'.
- Consider use of a 'no rinse shampoo cap', which is a product that can be massaged to clean hair and scalp without the need for water.

## **Haircuts**

- If you plan to take your child to a hairdresser, you may wish to share these strategies with them.
- The Queensmill Trust Therapy and Family Support team can provide visual support for going to the hairdresser.
- You can search the online Autism Directory where you may be able to find ASD-friendly hairdressers  
<http://www.theautismdirectory.com/default.asp?contentID=1>

*If you have any concerns about your child's hair care, discuss with their Occupational Therapist or teacher.*