Sensory Strategies: Washing

Children’s Therapy Services
Sensory Strategies

- Use unscented soap to decrease sensitivities.
- Use a heavy flannel and apply pressure strokes on the body.
- If your child is fearful in balance-related activities, try showering rather than bathing (because there are less changes in body position).
- Water that is warm to the touch is the best temperature; have your child test to ensure comfort.
- Children who are uncomfortable changing the position of their head may not lie down to rinse their hair in the bath; try a handheld shower or cover their eyes with a flannel and use a jug of water to rinse their hair.
- Try to incorporate fascination with water falling from the tap and bubbles into play while washing.
- Dim the lights and minimise sound if your child is easily overwhelmed.
- Be careful that your child does not eat the soap
- Allow choice of shower or bath.
- Try a bath rail because children may be frightened getting into and out of the bath (ask your O.T. for advice).
- When shampooing apply deep pressure to head.
- Use pressure and downward strokes with a flannel and a towel if your child is sensitive to touch.
- Use pressure when drying with a towel.
- Dry in front of a mirror and name the body parts to increase your child’s body “map.”
- Use a small hand towel to dry as it is less bulky to manage and allows for more visual direction.
Other Strategies

- Tell your child when you plan to touch him or her with the flannel or bath brush or foam brush.
- Use cognitive preparation strategies; for example, “We will wash your right arm and then your left arm.”
- Use visual aids to assist with the comprehension of the task.
- Provide lots of water play in a sink or bowl with fun toys (e.g., squirt gun, boat, diver, squeeze bottle, bubbles, bubble bath, bath foam soap, soap crayons, roll-on soap).

Ideas for Self Help Skills – for children with Sensory Issues

Adapted from ‘Building Bridges through Sensory Integration’ by Ellen Youch, Paula Aquilla & Shirley Sutten
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If you require this information in a different format such as in large print or on audio tape, or in a different language please contact the service on the details above.

If you have any compliments about this service or suggestions for improvements, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0300 131 1000 (charges may apply depending on your network) or email: ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net.

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