

## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY DEPARTMENT

### Haircutting

First look at why your child dislikes these activities. Your child may have sensitivity to touch, sound or smell. This sensitivity may create a fear response in them that prevents from them completing these activities. If you can work out why they dislike this particular activity it can help you develop and increase their tolerance.



#### Before the Haircut

- Show photos of the hairdressing salon so that they know what to expect. Try taking them to meet the hairdresser and familiarise themselves with the environment, without the pressure of having their hair cut straight away.
- Use visual aids/social stories about what to expect and tailor it to their sensory needs. Read this regularly prior to any visits and continue to read it during the appointment.
- Change the vocabulary – use the word “trim” instead of “cut” to make the process less frightening.
- Complete some heavy work activities such as jumping or wall push ups. Complete a head/neck massage to help desensitise their head.

#### During the haircut

- Bring visuals, a “first/then” board or a timer to the salon so that your child has some awareness of the length of time the hair cut will take and what activity will follow after, e.g. first – haircut, then – park.
- If they dislike the sound of the clipper, see if scissors can be used or try using headphones/ear defenders to block out some noise. Make sure they are able to hear you, so that they do not become scared at unexpected touch.
- Consider using a fidget toy, a favourite book or toy to help them to remain calm throughout the haircut. This will also help focus their attention away from the haircut onto something they like.
- Considering having your child on your lap whilst they have their hair cut. You can then offer deep pressure hugs, which can assist them to stay calm.
- Try using a towel and clip rather than a plastic gown, as this can be irritating.

#### After the haircut

- Give your child lots of praise and rewards if appropriate.
- Complete some heavy work activities or head/neck massage to help desensitise.

## Nail Trimming

First look at why your child dislikes these activities. Your child may have sensitivity to touch, sound or smell. This sensitivity may create a fear response in them that prevents from them completing these activities. If you can work out why they dislike this particular activity it can help you develop and increase their tolerance.



- A few days before, start to practice nail trimming on a piece of card. Draw on fingernails and allow them to practice cutting the nails with scissors. Use the same scissors or nail cutter you plan to use for the actual nail cutting, therefore your child will be familiar with them. Practice this on several occasions.
- Model the task of nail trimming on yourself, a family member or friend and encourage your child to watch.
- Try to name the activity something different, such as nail “trimming”, as the word “cutting” may cause anxiety.
- When trimming nails, scissors are usually less threatening than nail clippers as they are quiet and don’t cut jagged edges. There are also some novelty nail clippers that are available which are usually smaller and may be more motivating.
- Ensure your child’s hands are “ready”. Allow them to complete heavy work activities or activities which encourage weight bearing through their hands such as crawling or animal walks.
- Soak hands in water so they are soft or trim nails following bath time. They may also benefit from a firm hand massage using deep, slow, firm movements. Allow them to massage their own hand if they want to.
- Firmly hold each nail you are trimming. Your child may also benefit from holding a fidget toy in the other hand to assist them to remain calm.
- Use a social story to show the sequence of events and use a visual timer to show how long the task will take whilst counting down the nails you trim.
- Praise your child - even if they only manage to tolerate one nail being trimmed initially.
- Complete some heavy work activities to help them to relax or some further head massage as they will be sitting for a while.

Together with you, in your local community