

HAIR WASHING TIPS

Compiled by Linda Cammaroto

The following are ideas sent in by OT's across the country. They are ideas many mothers and OT's have found helpful when washing your little ones hair, especially if they have tactile defensive behavior.

When tactile defensive behavior is present, it is important to treat the defensive behavior. Many therapists have had good success with using the PRR (Protective Response Regime) brushing program. In addition here are some helpful suggestions from therapists across the country on the AOTA list serve. Some have been edited or combined for brevity and clarity.

1. A tactic that worked with two of my screamers was to have the child sit in the tub, with a **hand held shower**, to direct the water. First the mother had to come up with a **song** that described the whole process. Something to the effect - "this is the way I scrub your hair" would work. The song would delineate all the stages of hair washing, so the child could anticipate just where she was in the process, and when this ordeal would be over. Initially the mother sang it over the child's screams until the child caught on and began to join her.

Next, the child was given a **thick hand towel**, which she pressed hard on her face. (No, it wasn't just to muffle her screams). It provided her with some proprioception, which helped with calming, and protected her face from the unexpected light touch of a rivulet trickling down. (Will also help keep the soap out of their eyes). As a TD kid this aspect was actually what was most upsetting. Together with a sensory diet etc. during the rest of the day, this child finally was able to tolerate hair washing. The younger sibling needed the same trick a few years later.

2. **ROLE PLAYING**-giving a bath or washing other items in a "water play" situation, such as giving the child's dolls, or toy animals/action figures a bath.
3. Giving a measure of control to the child is important. There are a few strategies that I have asked the parent to try in conjunction with a sensory diet and direct therapy 2x per week. I think all kids are different and respond to different approaches. I asked her to try all of the above:
 - Giving the child a cup in the tub to rinse his/her hair with.
 - Buying the camping waterless shampoo if needed at this point (rather than to stress him to meltdown every day). I asked her to try games like catching water in his mouth so that he can tolerate the whole experience
 - In the shower, try having the child in the tub face down like he is swimming in a pool.

- In therapy, we do lots of proprioceptive and vestibular activities and we pretend to give a baby doll a bath. In the last month, I have introduced **washing** the baby's **hair** and use shaving.
4. I went to a workshop on behavior related to Asperger's. Use of **picture sequences** was a suggestion for all tasks for these guys so they know what is expected and what is coming next. One teacher there said she laminated the sequence for showering for an older girl, and the girl took a token that was velcroed to the sheet for each step that she completed.
 5. A preschooler might benefit from using a **foam head guard** that I used when my daughter was little. It looks like a hat brim with out the hat and acted as a little umbrella to keep the water and soap out of her eyes. I also taught her to look up at the ceiling as I used the handheld shower to rinse her head, so the soap would not run into her eyes.
 7. The child could **also try to wash mommy's hair**, with mom on knees and head hanging over the tub.
 8. A strategy such as counting the number of rinses may help the child understand when the whole procedure will be over.
 9. Deep pressure may be helpful with a tactually defensive child prior to hair washing.
 10. Decrease the lighting in the bathroom, playing soft music, and offering favorite toys during bath time. May also be helpful-set the mood so bath time is pleasant.