

SENSORY STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

What is sensory processing?

'Sensory processing' is how we understand information from the world around us - through our senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. There are also two other senses, 'proprioception' (body awareness) and 'vestibular' (balance and movement).

Daily routines

A lot of children, some who have Sensory Processing Disorders and others who do not, find some of the everyday routines hard to tolerate. Here are some suggestions/tips that may help your child tolerate some of these common daily routines that they find difficult.

Hair brushing...

😊 Use gentle yet firm brush strokes and try sitting your child in front of a mirror so they can see what is happening.

😊 Put brushing hair into your child's daily routine using the same brush in the same room where possible e.g. get dressed, clean teeth and then brush hair.

😊 Try using a song or rhyme as you brush. Finish brushing when the song ends so that they know how long the task will take.

😊 Try using a good detangling conditioner or detangling spray. Some hairbrushes such as 'Tangle Teezer' seem to glide more easily through hair. Keep hair shorter to make hair brushing easier if they really dislike hair brushing.

😊 Stickers or reward charts might be helpful.

😊 Keep it fun. Play 'hairdressers' with your child, where they brush and style your hair too, and encourage your child to brush their toys' hair.

Bath/shower time

😊 Try to work out which part of the bath time routine is most stressful for your child, as this may help you to work out a way forward.

😊 Try a non-slip mat as this may help your child sit more securely and a step will help them get in and out of the bath more confidently.

😊 Stay calm and keep it fun. Try using play as a distraction. For example, hide toys in containers or under bubbles, use bath crayons, bath toys and squirty bottles. Singing songs about bath time may help.

😊 Read stories with your child about bath time so they understand what is going to happen.

😊 Try getting a sponge or flannel with a character that your child particularly likes, such as Thomas or Peppa Pig.

😊 Consider the temperature of the water, and use firm pressure when washing and drying your child as this can be more predictable and calming.

😊 Do not bath your child every night if they become very upset about it, and try keeping the time spent in the bath to a minimum.

😊 Try singing or playing a favourite song for the duration of the bath so that your child knows how long the task will take. A visual timer such as a stop clock or sand timer may be useful.

😊 Try (if your child is sensitive to touch) using firm downwards strokes when drying your child and wrap them tightly in a soft warm towel and give them hugs to end the bath routine

😊 If your child does not like too much movement then they may feel more secure in a shower, as the water in a shower only moves in one direction.

Hair washing

😊 It may be that they are sensitive to having their head tipped backwards or forwards, try a bath visor as this means that your child will not have to tip their head and it keeps water out of their face and ears.

😊 Be mindful of the temperature of the water or the smell of the shampoo, it may be a smell that they cannot tolerate, try different fragrances and using a no tears shampoo.

😊 Wash sparingly - We are normally washing children's hair quite often. Step back and figure out the longest your child can go before washing their hair again. Maybe every 3-4 days, even 1 time a week could be appropriate.

😊 Let your child see you having your hair washed and encourage them to wash their toys hair with shampoo. Sing a song so that they know when hair washing will start and finish, use the same song each time.

😊 Use pressure touch when washing hair as this can be calming for your child and when patting dry hair, use a soft towel try and do at a set time in a routine so it becomes predictable for your child.

😊 A calming activity before and a desired choice activity after can also be helpful. Talk to your child first we wash our hair and then.

Tooth brushing...

😊 Reading your child stories or showing them books that feature tooth brushing or pictures of the sequence of brushing may be helpful.

😊 Ensure that your child is sat or standing securely while they are brushing their teeth.

😊 Different children prefer different flavours of toothpaste so try a different variety. You could also try different types of toothbrush. A rubber type of brush such as Nuk may be helpful initially and character toothbrushes may be more motivating for some children.

😊 Let your child brush their own teeth for part of the routine.

😊 Keep it fun and encourage your child to role-play 'brushing' a toy's teeth or your teeth.

😊 Reward charts may be helpful.

😊 Have a visual timer or sing a favourite song for the duration of the task, to let your child know how long brushing will take.