

Helping My Sensory Needs

Everyday situations: Visiting the Hairdresser



Watch videos of other children visiting the hairdresser, in the resources section below.

Consider taking your child to the hairdresser for siblings or yourself, so they can get to know the situation when they are only expected watch. This might help them understand what is happening.



Hairdressers are often very busy places. For children with extra needs, having a haircut can be extra challenging because the feelings, sounds and sensory experiences are very close to their face!

When something unexpected happens close to the face, the reflex is to run away.

It's very important to prepare children and give them positive experiences of having a haircut, where they can take breaks and stop when they become nervous, so that they don't become overwhelmed and afraid to come back next time.

Parents & hairdressers can work together to help children prepare and have a positive time.

1) Watch videos & play with toys about the haircut

2) Visit for a family member and watch

3) Visit for themselves

You could phone the hairdresser to ask for pictures or videos of what the environment looks like and a video the hairdresser introducing themselves. On the visit, let the child hold & play with any new items that are safe.

Clippers or Scissors?



The sound and vibration of clippers can be uncomfortable. To prepare a child for clippers, consider having an electric toothbrush for your child to play with a few weeks beforehand. When introducing



this count 'on 1, 2, 3, off', demonstrate holding it yourself first, then gently offer for them to hold, experiment playing with the toothbrush on the hand and arms. Do not rush to put it near the mouth. If they will find this too difficult, try doing craft with scissors so they can become familiar with '1, 2, 3, snip' and the sound.

Prepare your Child:

Help your child to play with haircut related items beforehand so they are less scary, like a cape, comb, brush, stray bottle.



Find books at the library about hairdressers. Play with your child, letting them wash or brush your hair.

Prepare the Appointment:

Time: Consider what time of day your child is most likely to be happy and calm, try asking for an appointment at a helpful time.



Inform: Prepare the hairdresser, by making sure they know your child has additional needs. You could say something like: 'It often helps if only one person speaks at a time, slowly and clearly, using simple language in a soft, calm voice'. Try to stay consistent, visiting the same hairdresser over time will help them become more familiar with the environment and person.



Prepare: Look at the social stories in the resources below with your child. Think about toys and calming items to bring with you. Make a visual schedule: a set of pictures to represent each step of the day. For example: car, haircut, snack, park, car, home. You can use photos, drawings or pictures, it can be on your phone or printed.



Objects of Reference: You can use a toy or item to represent the haircut, to help them understand what is coming next. Use it each time to prepare your child, if words and books (social stories) are not engaging for them. Watch this video to see how:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vetUsvdjX1A>

On the day

Bring their favourite toys & snacks.

If they are able to understand, explain 'now' haircut, 'next' and provide a preferred activity for afterwards e.g. 'park'. This video helps show Now & Next:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tR6f3cXD68U>

If they find it helpful, give them movement and deep pressure before the appointment e.g. run up the stairs, down & jump into parent's arms for a hug.

Advocate for your child's needs, ask for a break or a rest, ask if you can hold them during the haircut.

Try to keep a calm and reassuring voice.

Massage:

If you feel confident and comfortable, and you know your child finds massage calming, consider offering them massage to the head and shoulders. Watch carefully for their signs if they want you to stop. Take a pause after a few minutes and see if they ask for more. (Massage is recommended because for some people, it counteracts the uncomfortable feeling of light touch from brushes and tugging on the hair).



In Case of Meltdown:

Keep the experience positive, try taking a break, having a walk around the block, playing a game together to help them calm down, they trying to come back. Avoiding anxiety & distress is very important, we don't want to create bad memories! It's okay to have a 'visit' that is to become more familiar, and after more visits build comfort in the environment, then have a successful visit.



Resources: Social Stories

Video: Getting a Haircut:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_JzyUmzNrU

Basic Video with Trimmer & Comb:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjFdfTvbRNY>

Helpful Video of a child who didn't want to go to the hairdresser

- For boys:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQW76ciXJ24>
- For girls:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAc6f2UvFm4>

'I can say if I do not like it' Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfkTcyAiZ4k>

Social Story:

<https://kidshairinc.com/services-products/fraser-partnership/social-story/>

Getting a Haircut Story:

<https://happylearners.info/social-stories/haircut.html>

Consider finding a 'sensory friendly'

Hairdresser:

- Little Fidgets Loughton:
<http://www.littlefidgetsloughton.co.uk/>
- North London SEN Barber:
<https://www.senbarber.co.uk/>
- Ask a local hairdresser if they provide a mobile service and could come to your home.
- Google, or call a local aged-care facility to ask for details of a mobile hairdresser.
- Raising Children Tips:
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/behaviour/common-concerns/appointments-asd>