

Headbanging



For some children, head banging is a way to release tension and prepare for sleep. Some children headband for relief when they are teething, have an ear infection, swollen tonsils and/or adenoids or other ENT issues. Some children bang their heads out of frustration or anger, as in a temper tantrum.

Head-banging is also common for sensory seeking in their younger years. When a child receives limited or no sensory input from any of his sensory systems, the child may bang his head to increase stimulation. On the other hand, a child with a hypersensitive nervous system may bang his head to decrease the stimulation to his sensory system. So, in other words, usually their reasons are to exchange one sensory input for another more irritating one, or seeking input to raise their overall sensory alertness. It is hard for many parents to understand, but strong, even painful sensation can actually be calming to a person who is experiencing internal turmoil.

Another way to look at it; Imagine that neurons in your child's brain are having a 'bad day'. Then you, the parent/teacher, comes along and wants the child to pay attention to you. But instead the child has a tantrum or meltdown and starts to bang their head incessantly. What seems like a whisper may sound like shouting to them. These kids are so overwhelmed by external sensory stimuli that they will bang their heads to help drown out the background noise. This is soothing for them and helps them to cope in a world that is a sensory minefield.



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Carefully watch what is happening before the head-banging;

- Stress
- Tiredness- erratic or insufficient sleep
- Boredom
- Undesired task
- Alone time
- Lack of attention
- Struggle to communicate
- The environment? Triggers may be physical, social or sensory (e.g., bright light, loud noises, being touched, wearing particular clothing, etc.).

Then think about what they get from the behaviour;

- Attention
- Avoidance of the task
- Comfort
- Something else

You might realise that they really don't get anything out of it other than the inherent sensory input.

Strategies

Provide lots of proprioceptive input to the child's head for example;

- Scalp massage
- Gentle cranial compressions
- Help them do head-stands
- Forward rolls
- Push a pillow across the floor with the child's head while on hands and knees
- Lycra tubes



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Headbanging also provide a lot of rhythmic vestibular input so find ways to provide this as well such as;

- Swinging (going on a swing)
- Jumping
- Frog umps
- Rocking
- Spinning (egg chair)
- Trampoline

If you notice triggers in the environment such as physical, social or sensory (e.g., bright light, loud noises, being touched, wearing particular clothing, etc.) try strategies such as;

- Cutting tags out of clothes
- Dimming lights
- Reducing noise



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