

Hair Washing: Sensory Processing



Top Tips

- Try different tools for rinsing their hair for example, squirt bottles, jug, squirting toys, watering can
- Use a low sud and tear free shampoo. Sometimes the suds can be overstimulating
- Use goggles, snorkle or a visor to protect them from water dripping into their eyes
- Provide a scalp massage before washing their hair- this provides proprioceptive input. Get them used to this by offering this in addition to bath time!
- Water play. Give them a bowl & Shampoo to wash their toys, to play to reduce hypersensitivity.
- Have the child lean forward with a face cloth over their eyes. Leaning back can be disorganising if the child has a sensitive vestibular system.
- Use a visual schedule for bath time so its predictable
- Use a thermometer to help find the right temperature of water with the child.
- Offer water proof earplugs to prevent water going into the ears and this can also reduce noise
- Try washing the ends of the hair initially, before moving to the scalp as this is more sensitive
- Reduce the number of times you wash hair per week
- Reduce lighting in the bathroom i.e.. dim lighting, close curtains/blinds



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- Offer the child a foam mirror so they can see what's happening
- Involve the child in choosing their shampoo, get them to smell it before purchasing
- Use a wet towel over their lap- this provides a "weighted blanket" which can act as a calming tool (do not leave child unsupervised)
- Try and remain calm, patient- this is a real thing causing them pain or discomfort
- Have shorter hair cuts
- Give them a fidget, something to hold whilst having their hair washed
- Try a bath rather than a shower or shower rather than a bath
- Wash their hair over a bowl or sink
- Use a visual timer so they know how long they have to endure
- Involve the child i.e... ask them to hold a face cloth, ask them to pass you the shampoo.
- Use a firm sponge, or firm pressure to decrease sensitivity. Using lighter pressure can tickle
- Use a handheld nozzle
- Encourage them to do it for themselves if able too
- Play music during bath time
- Use fragrance free products
- Flush the toilet so there are no unpleasant smells
- Use a non-slip mat
- Use less water- so they feel more stable.
- If able use a bath seat to provide stability



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- Make bath time fun i.e, Blow bubbles in the bath
- Sing rhythmic songs such as 5 little ducks went swimming one day
- Have bath toys in the bath- even for older children i.e. watering can, buckets, foam shapes, bath crayons
- Use bubbles to make funny hair styles
- Use foam soap/crazy bath foam
- Be predictable i.e. same activity before and after bath time
- Involve the child in preparing for their bath time i.e. them choosing the toys, getting the shampoo out
- Have the jugs of water ready to rinse hair to save delays
- Use a pillow at the back of the child's head
- Offer a mouth tool i.e. chewelry
- Use a wet face cloth to wash hair- this may be enough
- Try a soap shampoo bar
- If safe to do so, provide a chewing snack during bath time



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