

Hair washing

Hair washing is an element of washing skills for your child to learn to increase their independence. Becoming independent in washing yourself is an important life skill that can give a young person a sense of pride and achievement. For some children and young people, hair washing may feel painful or uncomfortable. For those with movement difficulties, it may be difficult to maintain a good sitting posture in the bath or they may find it hard to stand in the shower. Stepping in and out of the shower or bath might be tricky as may tilting their head for the shampoo to be washed out.



Have a think about the last time you learnt a new skill; what was it that helped you learn this? How did you feel? What kept you motivated to keep going, even when it got difficult? How many times did you practise before the new skill became automatic? If you were to do it again, is there anything you would do differently?

What can you do to support your child with developing hair washing skills?

- ✔ Encourage your child to become independent with one aspect of hair washing first. For example you put the shampoo on their head, and ask them to rub it into their scalp. Once they've done this, you can wash the shampoo out for them. Over time, gradually increase how much you ask them to do
- ✔ Ensure that your child is safe in the bath or shower. If they are concerned about slipping or losing balance, they won't have the mind space to think about washing their hair. It may be easier to sit down if a child is finding it hard to balance when standing and closing their eyes at the same time
- ✔ Encourage your child to monitor their own progress by asking questions like "How did that go?" or "What could make that better?"
- ✔ Some children may need direct, simple prompts, such as "use both hands" or "look what you're doing" or "now the back of your head"
- ✔ You can use actions alongside prompts, such as using your hands to rub your own head if your child finds it helpful to see what it is they should be doing
- ✔ Some children find it helpful to have 'hands on' help to experience the action required. For example, hold your hand over or under theirs as you massage in the shampoo
- ✔ Give lots of praise to reward effort, identifying clearly what action they have done which you are proud of



Setting the 'just right' challenge with your child

It is important to enable your child to gain a sense of achievement when learning a new skill. The 'just right' challenge ensures that you are encouraging your child to develop their skills and independence, whilst ensuring that the goal they are working towards is realistic. The sense of achievement that they experience acts as a great motivator to encourage your child to keep working towards mastering these skills.



Things to consider:

- Does your child prefer a bath or a shower?
- Do they understand the process of hair washing and what they need to do?
- Are they able to move their arms and hands to reach their head? Can they tip their head back when rinsing?
- How much of the task can they already do? What is going well?
- What part of the task are they currently finding difficult/do not like?
- How much of the task do you/they expect them to complete by themselves?
- How much support will you give them during the task?

Things to support hair washing

Making it fun: put a plastic mirror at the end of the bath and help your child to make shapes with their shampoo-covered hair. Horns and halos, curls and twirls – these will all serve as a distraction, and your child may not even notice that their hair is being washed at the same time. Similarly, you could bathe your child with their siblings (depending on their age), and they can take it in turns to make shampoo styles on each other. This also gives your child the opportunity to actually see what hair washing entails on another person, and maybe make it less scary for them.

Distraction: having toys in the bath, water crayons or letters/numbers that stick to the tiles can keep your child busy whilst you wash their hair. You could also play a body game where you ask: "Where is your nose? Where is your tummy? Where is your knee?" By the time you have worked all round the body, you will have washed their hair, if you're quick!

Positioning: encourage your child to look at the ceiling when you rinse their hair, so the water and shampoo doesn't drip into their eyes. Consider putting stickers on the ceiling to encourage them. This could be letters or pictures that they have to search for (such as 'Where's Wally?') while their head is back.

Aids: there are many aids and tools available to buy to support hair washing. Shampoo rinsing cups prevent water from going into your child's eyes and over their face. Shampoo shields fit on your child's head like a cap or sun visor and prevent water from running into their eyes. Or you can use a clean flannel or small towel, which your child can hold over their eyes as you rinse out the shampoo. Swimming goggles will keep the water out and allow your child to keep their eyes open during the rinsing process.

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