

Washing Skills

Bathing and showering is an important skill 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, bath time is an opportunity to have fun and play with their toys. As some children grow older, bath or shower time provides an opportunity to relax and unwind. For others, washing can be challenging and it can become one of the most stressful times of the day for you and your child.



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 practice 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 washing skills?

- ✔ Encourage your child to become independent with one aspect of washing first. For example, you put the soap on the flannel and then give it to your child to wash the upper part of their body. This is generally easier than any other section as they're not required to bend down or balance and they can see all sections whilst doing it
- ✔ Washing your child at the same time every day, in the same order and using the same tools (i.e. same flannel, same soap etc.) will establish a consistent routine and make it easier for your child to learn
- ✔ 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 the washing process. It may be easier to sit down in a shower if your child is finding it hard to balance
- ✔ 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 when washing, such as "use both hands" or "look at what you're doing" or "now under your armpit"
- ✔ You can use actions alongside prompts, such as rubbing your hand down your arm to demonstrate how to wash their arm, 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 wash under their armpit
- ✔ 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 washing and what they need to do?
- Are they able to move their hands and body in the way needed to wash?
- 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?

Motivating your child to wash

- ✔ **Rewards** – it is more effective to focus on things that will motivate your child, and ways to encourage them to do it themselves without any prompting such as reward or behaviour charts. Depending on the age of your child, the reward will be varied and it is important to discuss what rewards are important for your child to ensure they are motivated to achieve this. Remember, rewards don't always have to be expensive
- ✔ **Soaps, shower gels and shampoos** – if your child struggles with different smells and finds them overpowering, use soaps, shower gels and shampoos that have no or minimal scent. Take your child shopping to give them the opportunity to smell different products, so they can choose their own soaps or shower gel. As they've chosen this product themselves, they may be more motivated to use it. There are also lots of varieties of bath bombs and bubble baths that make exciting colours in the bath, which may be more inviting for your child to try
- ✔ **Water worries** – if your child does not like the feeling of the water on their skin, it may be that you need to support them to gradually increase the amount of time they spend in the bath or shower. This may be as short as 30 seconds at a time initially. Sometimes the pressure of the shower can feel too hard against your child's skin, so they are happier getting a bath. If a shower is their only option, sometimes having hold of the shower head means that your child has more control over the water on their body. Ask them to see where it feels best to hold the shower head, closer or further away from their body as each way will feel different. If your child is becoming extremely distressed in the shower or bath, washing at a basin may be the best option for your child. This is a good way for them to practise washing skills using a flannel or sponge without the added stress of splashing water. Your child may then move into a shallow bath whilst standing following the same method, then introduce sitting in the bath then increase the water in the bath and so on
- ✔ **Visuals** – if your child forgets what to do and you need to keep telling them what part of their body they need to wash, or you feel that they're not thoroughly washing their whole body, a checklist or cue card might be helpful. This could be something that you create with your child, talking about all the things they need to do, and asking them to write a list to take in the bathroom with them to guide them
- ✔ **Be patient** – remain positive and encouraging. As much as you may get to a point where you want to, don't try to physically force your child to bathe or shower, because it won't work and it will add to the challenging situation



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