

## SELF CARE LOOKING AFTER MY BODY

### HAIR CUTTING

We all interpret information from the environment around us in different ways. Some people find certain types of input more distressing or distracting than others e.g. touch (tactile input). This discomfort may be particularly present with light touch on the skin, e.g. from a shower spray or being tickled. Unexpected sensory experiences of any kind are also threatening e.g. touching someone from behind. **The head is particularly sensitive to touch**, which can make hair cutting an uncomfortable and sometimes distressing experience.



Touch is a primary and basic sensory system, so when children are sensitive to touch they may react negatively to touch input e.g. screaming, crying or hitting back. This is because the nervous system is interpreting the stimulus as potentially harmful or dangerous.

It is possible to prepare your child for sensations that they may find threatening; this should help to reduce their response and with time hopefully they will increase their tolerance of difficult tactile situations, **although their bodies will continue to interpret them as something they do not like**. Not all the strategies below will work for one person so experiment. You may already be doing some of these, if they are working, keep going!

### STRATEGIES TO TRY

- Where possible, avoid light touch. Always touch your child gently but firmly, and approach from a direction that they can see you coming. A mirror can be useful as your child can see what is happening.
- Always touch on the child's terms. Touching yourself is less threatening so where possible have your child rub dry their own hair. Touch through an object is the next least threatening way, so use a towel or clothing in between your hand and the child's skin until they can tolerate this. Then you can move onto skin to skin contact.
- If your child reacts defensively to tactile situations then prior to hair cutting prepare them verbally and visually for the activity.
- Grade activities from deep touch to light touch.
- Prepare for light touch by providing firm deep pressure prior to this. You can teach your child to use a self-massage or squeezing programme, or you can provide deep pressure by giving a firm rub down with a towel prior to hair cutting.
- Massage his scalp prior to combing/brushing/cutting.



- Have your child apply deep pressure through their legs or hands whilst they are sitting in the hairdresser's chair. Encourage your child to sit on their hands whilst they are having their hair cut and see if this works.
- Give definite time limits to the task; for example say 'we will count down from then and then we will stop cutting'.
- Try earphones/earplugs to block out the noise of clippers/dryer etc
- Air blow away all bits of hair after cutting to avoid irritation on skin.
- Dim the lights and minimise sound if your child is easily overwhelmed.
- Allow your child to fidget with a toy or squeeze a small ball etc whilst they are having their hair cut.

