



# Sensory Processing Service

Advice for Smearing



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# Advice for Smearing

Here you will find some information on what smearing is, why it might be happening, and strategies which may prevent it

What is Smearing?:

Smearing is when a child spreads their poo on themselves, walls, furniture and anywhere else apart from their toilet, potty, pants or nappy. (ERIC, 2021).

Why does smearing happen?:

Medical reasons:

- Feeling unwell, or in pain; constipation.

Sensory reasons:

- Reluctance to wipe because the toilet paper is too harsh.
- Wanting the sensation from the texture and smell of poo.
- The sensations of hand and arm movements whilst smearing.
- Having a bath or shower after smearing might be enjoyable for the child, so could be interpreted as a reward.
- Interoceptive sense may not be telling them when they need to make a bowel movement.

Behavioural reasons:

- Not knowing where poo needs to go; seeking attention or a reaction.



## Strategies to prevent smearing:

- Provide alternative stimulation for touch and smell. For touch, you could provide something that has a similar texture (such as playdough) to keep the child occupied. For smell, you could provide with a scented hankie to carry around with them, or you could put some essential oil in the playdough or other sensory material.
- Try to avoid washing the child in a bath or shower straight after the smearing. The child might enjoy the sensation of bathing, so this could potentially reinforce smearing. Instead you could try washing the child with wet wipes and then washing them in the bath or shower later on in the day, as part of their usual routine.
- Try to be calm when dealing with smearing. Avoid having a strong reaction to smearing as this could reinforce the behaviours. Similarly try to use minima interaction when cleaning up the smearing.
- Provide alternative activities at times when smearing usually occurs, such as finger painting.
- If the child doesn't like the feel of toilet paper, try using wet wipes.

 Visit:

[sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk](https://sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk)

for more help and information.



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