



Sensory Processing Service

Hair Cutting Advice &
Strategies



Caring, Learning
& Growing Together

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Hair Cutting Advice & Strategies

- Having your haircut can be difficult for lots of different reasons if you have Sensory Processing Differences.
- It involves lots of light unpredictable touch, and hair falling on your face and body.
- It demands sitting still, sometimes for quite long periods of time
- It requires someone being very close to you (probably someone you don't know well), and bringing lots of objects close to your face and eyes
- There are lots of unpredictable sounds in the environment, and chairs that move and wobble
- There are lots of textures and sensations – water, hairdryers, combing, scissors, clippers and chair fabric
- It can involve having a cape around your neck
- We often need to change our head position, or have it manipulated which can feel scary or feel unsafe

There are so many sensory demands which is why some people find it extremely challenging

Things to consider and tips to help

Find The Right Person

- Choosing someone who you feel comfortable with and have people you know around us to ensure you feel safe. Parents/ carers, can support during a haircut, but it can be so helpful if you can find the 'right' person who is able to be playful, yet predictable and safe for your child.



Think About the Timing

- Visiting the hairdressers right at the beginning or the end of the day may offer a quieter or calmer session, which might be helpful for your child.
- Also, think about what time of day might fit best for your child. Does later in the day provide more opportunity for preparation? Or do you notice their thresholds and tolerance for sensory input is lowered as the day progresses?
- Completing activities which are rich in Proprioceptive sensory input are hugely beneficial in supporting a calm and alert state; this puts your child in the best place to be able to tolerate disorganising sensory experiences such as haircuts. You can take a look at a range of ways you can provide Proprioceptive sensory input on our [Resources Page](#).

Think About the Place

- It might be helpful to have practice visits to the hairdresser to sit in the specific chair that your child will be sitting in, to build familiarity. Some hairdressers are specially for children (some are even specific for children with Autism, for example), and they may have themed areas such as sitting in 'cars' which could be a big help!

Regulating During the Haircut

- Activities which might be calming during the haircut could include;
- Having a weighted toy or pillow on their lap (*provides calming deep tactile pressure*)
- Having something to squeeze, pull or stretch – like a 'Stretch Armstrong', or rubber fiddle toy (*provides calming proprioception*)
- Depending on the chair, sitting on a wedge to help your child to stay active in their sitting position and feel more secure (*provides postural support*)



- Trying to ensure your child's feet can touch the floor to feel safe (*provides postural stability*)
- Having something to (safely) chew or suck on, such as a lollipop, an ice pop, or crunchy vegetable sticks, or a chewy toy (*provides calming proprioception*)
- Taking short breaks and having chance to move around might be helpful to break down a long haircut, perhaps with the use of a visual timer so your child knows when a break is coming! (*provides opportunity for self-regulation without becoming overwhelmed*)

Questions You Could Ask the Hairdresser

- Could the hairdresser adjust the environment at all? Perhaps dim any bright lights, or maybe even cover the mirror if it is overstimulating for your child. Some children might like to feel the scissors or clippers before it is brought close to their head/ ears/ face (safely of course!).
- You could also advise the hairdresser that **firm, predictable** touch is more organising than **light, unpredictable** touch. Therefore firmly touching their head or shoulders and firmly brushing off falling hair (rather than using a brush or lighter movements) might be helpful. Always letting the child know before you go.

After the visit

- Think about what sensory activities are fun and regulating for your child, and provide opportunity for them to access them as soon as possible after their haircut so that their memory of the event is as positive as possible. It might be helpful to pay in advance, for example, so you don't have to wait around afterwards to organise payment.



Visit:

sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk
for more help and information.