My Family-Hygiene Tips
Table of Contents

Page 3 Hand washing
Page 4 Showering, Bathing Hair washing
Page 5 Oral Hygiene \fingernails
Page 6 Haircuts
Hygiene
“How can I get my child to take a bath or clean their teeth? It is a battle every night.”
• Hygiene and personal care can be a problem for children, young people and adults with autism. Families find it difficult to ensure the person with ASD engages in personal care tasks and people with autism find it a problem because they do not like the sensory demands that go with personal care routines.
• For people with Autism washing their face and hair, cleaning teeth, shaving or having fingernails cut is intensely uncomfortable, frightening or even painful. Many people with autism also do not see the point in engaging in this behaviour, as they do not see the problem with having poor hygiene or may not care what other people think.
• Young children with autism may be too busy engaging in self-stimulatory behaviour or with their obsessive interest to want to have a bath and may become very defiant or difficult to manage at this time of the day.

Hand washing-
Children with autism can be prone to avoiding hand washing. This can be because they easily forget to do so, have sensory concerns such as water or soap avoidance or may dislike the bathroom, water or the sound of the hand dryer in public bathrooms.
Hand washing is important for health and hygiene reasons. Establish a strong and washing routine can help eliminate some of the common colds and gastro bouts that children are prone to.
• Hand washing after toileting, before meals, after handling pets is particularly important.
• Activity cards with sequence strips can help as can social stories
• Prompting the child after each toilet visit is important and the child may need to be physically assisted so they know what to do.
• Use unscented soap /get the child to choose some soap
• A pump pack soap may be easier than a bar of soap (also more hygienic)
• Use earplugs in noisy public bathrooms with hand dryers
• Support from an Occupational Therapist may be needed if sensory concerns are making hand washing a battle

An example of a social script about hand washing may read
I need to wash my hands because they get dirty. Dirty hands can make me sick.
I will wash my hands
After I go to the toilet
After I touch my pets
Before I eat
After I am finished playing outside
After I cough, sneeze or pick my nose.

When I wash my hands I need to
Go to the bathroom
Wet my hands
Get some soap on my hands
Rub my hands together and make lots of bubbles  
Wash the soap off my hands under the tap  
Dry my hands on a towel  
I will do a good job washing my hands.  
Pictures, photos or an activity sequence may be needed to prompt hand washing.  
Hand over hand support may be needed for very reluctant hand washers.

(http://www.boardmakershare.com/Activity/299757/handwashing-sign)

**Showering/bathing /hair washing**  
For parents of a child with autism, showering, bathing and hair washing can be a constant battle.  
• The child may be very resistant to undressing, getting wet, washing their face or hair,. And then getting out of the bath or shower and putting clean clothes on.  
• For those children or young people with autism who will shower, learning to wash themselves can be difficult.  
• If not prompted a young person with autism will just stand under the water enjoying then sensory component of showering and not actually wash anything.  
• Hair washing can be a difficult area for children with autism who often do not like getting their face or head wet when bathing.  
• Activity sequences, photo stories or social stories can be useful helpers with bathing and showering.  
• Activity sequences for drying and dressing can help if the child does not get dressed in the correct order.  
• For school aged children with autism having a bath or shower can be a great way to unwind and calm down after school if they are agitated or upset.  
• Build bathing or showering into the daily routine. Night time showers or baths before bed can be a great way for the child to relax and help to support a good sleep routine.

**Useful tips-**  
• Use swim goggles to keep water out of eyes  
• Use Kids shampoo/ baby shampoo/no sting shampoo  
• Have plenty of towels ready  
• A hand held shower attachment can be useful  
• Older children will need to be told when to wash their hair as they will not instinctively know when it needs to be done.  
• A kitchen timer may be useful to indicate the minimum amount of time the child will need to be washing their hair.  
• Let the child select the type of soap or shampoo  
• Have a special towel and washer or bath toys.
Oral hygiene
Teeth cleaning can be very difficult for children with autism. Oral sensitivity or strong gag reflex may make teeth cleaning unpleasant. The child may not tolerate someone in very close proximity touching them to support cleaning their teeth, and they may not understand why cleaning their teeth is important.

• A social script, story or activity sequence will be very important to support why cleaning teeth is important and how to do it.
• The child may not tolerate toothpaste as mint flavours can be overpowering. Try different flavour's of toothpaste, or just use plain water.
• An electric toothbrush may be tolerated more successfully than a regular toothbrush
• A kitchen timer may be useful to let the child know how long to brush their teeth.
• The child may need a photo prompt sequence or other visual reminder to clean their teeth.

A script for teeth cleaning may read;
I need to clean my teeth each day so they keep clean and healthy
I should clean my teeth in the morning after breakfast and before I go to bed at night.
When I clean my teeth I need
My toothbrush
Tooth paste
A cup
A towel or washer
Some water
I brush my teeth in the bathroom in the sink
I only use my toothbrush to clean my teeth my toothbrush is ………. (red, blue etc.)
I pick up my toothbrush. I put some toothpaste on it. I only need a little bit of toothpaste.
I put some water on my toothbrush and put it in my mouth.
The toothpaste tastes like Mint, bubble-gum etc. I do not eat or swallow the toothpaste. Toothpaste is not food.
I take care to brush all my teeth up and down and in the front and back.
I can spit the toothpaste into the sink and get more water on my brush when I need to.
When I am finished brushing my teeth is spit the toothpaste out into the sink.
I can have a drink of water or wash my mouth out when I am finished.
I can wipe my mouth on a towel or washer when I am finished.
I have done a great job of cleaning my teeth. My teeth will be healthy and strong.

Fingernails
Cutting fingernails can often be very difficult to achieve but is important for hygiene and safety reasons. Children with autism are often resistant to nail cutting as
• It is a strange sensation
• A person is in very close physical proximity to them/ touching them
• They do not understand nails grow back
• They may not be able to keep still long enough
Tips—try cutting the child’s nails after a bath or shower when they are more likely to be relaxed. Do it when they are asleep as a last resort. Get into a routine and do it once a month. Mark it on the calendar so the child can see when it will happen next. You may need another person to support you whilst you cut the child’s nails. A social or photo story about nail cutting can be useful.

Final tips to support hygiene
- Use visual aides and social stories
- Make hygiene tasks part of the routine each day
- Include the child’s obsessive interest as part of the routine.
- Let the child choose the soap, toothpaste, shampoo etc.
- Praise and reward positive behaviour.
- Get support from an Occupational Therapist if needed.

Haircuts
- Getting a haircut with a child with autism is often extremely difficult.
- Children with autism often fear having their hair cut because they do not realise hair grows back
- Sitting still in a chair is difficult
- The mirror may be distracting or annoying
- Someone is touching them in a sensitive area
- Noise of the salon—hairdryers, clippers or people talking is uncomfortable
- Smells of the salon—dyes, bleaches etc are strong smells which could make a person with autism feel quite ill.

Overcoming difficulties with getting a haircut:
- Get a hairdresser to come and cut the child’s hair at home
- Use a social story or photo book about getting a haircut.
- Reward afterwards with a toy or chosen activity or a chosen food reward.
- Give the child something to hold or play with/chew tap etc whilst in the chair.
- Reward good sitting
- Use an egg timer to indicate how long the child needs to sit for their haircut.
- Build a good relationship with a local hairdresser and go to the same place for haircuts whenever possible
- Go in a quiet time, out of hours,
- Choose an easy hairstyle—for boys a short haircut with clippers is often quicker and more practical than using scissors.

Autism awareness cards available from Autism Victoria and Gateways stating—“Please excuse my child’s behaviour he/she has autism” can be a quick fix in a situation where your child is acting out and members of the public are having an issue with their behaviour.
Example of a social script about a haircut;
Getting a hair cut
When my hair gets long I need a haircut. It is important to have a haircut so I look good.
I will look different with my haircut. Looking different is ok.
My hair will grow back again. When I have my hair cut we will go to X hairdresser - insert photo
I will sit in the chair quietly.

The hair cut may tickle but it will not hurt
When the hair cut is finished mum will say “finished now” and i can get out of the chair.
Mum will be happy, the hairdresser will be happy.
My hair will look different and it will look good.
Further resources –
Activity sequences can be downloaded from
http://www.boardmakershare.com