

Topic Summary

Haircuts can be a very stressful experience for some young people and their families. This pack contains ideas, strategies, links and parent tips that will help you to identify the main issues and perhaps make things a little easier.

Information

Haircuts can be a very challenging experience for lots of children and one that parents/ carers often worry about. A hairdressing salon can be a very over stimulating environment so for some children just walking inside is too stressful. If your child is struggling with haircuts it can help to break down the task so that you are able to identify the parts that are causing them to feel stressed.

The Environment

Salons can be busy, hot and noisy with hair driers and lots of chatter. There is often new/strange smells alongside different textures and bright lights. For some children looking at themselves in a mirror might be something that they try to avoid and that is almost impossible in a salon. Once you have taken a look around the salon you may be able to identify which things are likely to cause your son/daughter to become upset. Or perhaps they can even tell you.

The Experience

Having your haircut means allowing someone to stand close to you and touch your head. This can be very hard for some children to tolerate. Alongside this, the feeling of the cut hair touching their skin or the feel of the cape that is worn can be very stressful. For some children the noise of the scissors or the fact that the chair moves is unbearable.

We have found that children's hairdressers make my daughter even more stressed. She hated all the bright colours and the TVs so we now go to a very quiet salon just before closing time and try to get in and out as quickly as possible.

If you have managed to work out what is upsetting your child you may find that some simple changes make the experience less stressful but for some children the cause of the distress is harder to identify.

Strategies

Schedules - A picture schedule or photo story may help some children prepare for a visit to the hairdresser. This could show the salon, the hairdresser and what will happen at each stage of the visit. You could also incorporate what will happen after a successful haircut. You might like to use one of the templates on our website or you may already have a way of presenting schedules that works for your child.

Selecting a Hairdresser - It is worth having a look around the local area and perhaps talking to other families to see if there is a salon that would be better for your son/daughter. Some children love the salons that are created specifically for their age group whereas other prefer a more grown up salon. Through speaking to other parents you may find that there is a particular hairdresser who has experience of working with young people who have additional needs.

Role Play - Acting out a situation can really help some children to feel at ease. This could be something that pre-school or school could help with too.

Pre-visits - if your child is anxious about going to the salon then you may want to ask if you can just pop in for some pre-visits. A good salon should allow you to come in and have a look around, perhaps try out the chair and even watch someone else have their hair cut.

Home hairdresser - If your child is more comfortable at home then it might be easier to book someone to cut their hair there. Many hairdressers are very skilled at cutting children's hair and don't worry about them moving around or wanting to take breaks. You might even want to try it yourself!

Apps and games - There are many hairdressing apps and games that can be downloaded for phones and tablets. These aren't educational but could be a fun way to help your child feel more relaxed.

Distraction - iPads, colouring, TV, singing, I Spy, toys, bubbles, games, books, comics, food - take along anything that may hold your child's attention and help them to feel calm. It can help to have a selection of items to hand.

Sensory - If your son/daughter is upset by the hair falling onto their skin they might like a cape that covers them from head to toe or even someone catching the hair. Some children like to block out the noise with earphones or wear sunglasses so that the lights don't seem so bright.



We set up a home salon for my daughter's dolls. She was the hairdresser and even washed their hair. I left this set up in her room and it was one of her favourite games. When we visited the hairdresser she knew what was going to happen.

Where to find out more

Check out our website for schedule templates and tips from other parents.

This is an American Guide to Autism and Haircuts. It might be something that you want to share with your local salon or hairdresser —

<http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/tips-successful-haircuts>

A guide to grooming including haircuts — <http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/07/31/a-special-needs-guide-to-haircuts-and-fingernail-trimming/>

Hairdressing tips from Downs Side Up —

<http://www.downssideup.com/2016/07/hairdressing-for-special-needs-kids.html#more>

Interesting info on the use of the word 'cut' -

<https://ellenotbohm.com/take-the-cut-out-of-haircut-for-kids-with-autism/>

Jargon Buster

Sensory perception - how we gather and interpret sensory information

Social Story - The goal of a Social Story™ is to share accurate social information in a patient and reassuring manner that is easily understood by its audience.

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