TEACHING YOUR CHILD HYGIENE AND GROOMING SKILLS

The thought of teaching your child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) about grooming and personal hygiene can be intimidating. As with any learning task, these tasks too can be broken down into smaller, manageable parts. This helps you and your child to monitor progress so that both of you can feel successful.

As your child approaches adolescence, it is important for him or her to understand the importance of being clean, looking nice, and having a neat appearance. Talk to him or her about smelling clean and looking his or her best. Use something that might inspire your child, perhaps a photo or a favorite movie, TV, or music idol. Taylor Swift motivated one young woman to even learn how to apply makeup! Consider posting laminated photos or pictures in the bathroom.

It is most important to develop a routine:

- Create and laminate a short checklist or keep it listed on a dry erase board.
- Number the steps and consider taking photos of your child going through his or her routine.
- Mount morning and bedtime routines on the wall in a place where your child will see them often.
- Have your child check off steps as he or she completes them.

Sample Morning Schedule:

1. Use the toilet
2. Wash hands
3. Wash face with soap
4. Rinse with water
5. Dry with towel
6. Apply moisturizer
7. Apply underarm deodorant
8. Get dressed
9. Hair care (you may want a separate checklist for this, depending on your child’s needs)
10. Breakfast
11. Brush/floss teeth
12. Rinse with mouthwash

Sample Evening Schedule:

1. Shave (you may want a separate checklist, depending on your child’s needs)
2. Shower (again, you may want a separate checklist mounted in the shower stall)
3. Dry off
4. Put on pajamas
5. Apply moisturizer
6. Brush/floss teeth
7. Rinse with mouthwash

Helpful Ideas:

- Whenever possible, give your child a choice of products, choice of textures, fragrances, etc.
- Keep the supplies near one another in the bathroom cabinet, or consider using baskets or a bathroom caddy with pockets for supplies.
- Have 2 baskets for the morning routine and two for the evening routine; keep all the supplies needed for the morning routine in one basket, and as each item is used, have your child put it into the second basket until the first basket is empty; create the same set of baskets for the evening routine.
- Number supplies in order of use.
- Make a self care book: create a booklet with step by step instructions with photos of supplies needed.
- When teaching your child about applying deodorant or fragrance, provide him or her with simple instructions that are easy to follow, such as two (or three) swipes of deodorant under the arm or holding out the perfume bottle at arm’s length and spraying one or two times. Taking pictures of your child spraying fragrance on will also help him or her remember these
- Laminated photos of supplies needed for each task can be posted to the bathroom wall or a self care book can remain in the bathroom.
- Use an iPad® or iPhone® to take digital pictures and create interest, but be careful what you use (no images of naked bodies). You can even put it to music! (Be careful with electronic devices near water; heed manufacturers’ instructions.)
- Use your “team” for help building and teaching these programs. In particular, your child’s occupational therapist may have good ideas for how to teach hygiene and grooming skills.

Related Articles:

- Toilet Training
- Tooth Brushing
- Tips on Learning to Shower
- Shaving for Young Women
- Hair Care for Girls and Young Women
- Shaving for Young Men
- Hair Care for Males
- Adolescence

Additional Resources:

- *Hygiene and Related Behaviors for Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum and Related Disorders* by Kelly Mahler, MS, OTR/L; Autism Asperger Publishing Company, 2009. Presented in a lesson plan format, the book is designed to help children with ASD make the connection between hygiene behaviors and how those behaviors are perceived by others. There is a CD with worksheets that can be downloaded and printed for use.
- *Personal Hygiene? What’s that Got to Do with Me?* by Pat Crissey; Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd., 2005. This book was developed for individuals with ASD and other learning and developmental disabilities to help them understand how others perceive their appearance and the social implications of neglecting personal hygiene. There are quizzes and hands-on activities to demonstrate why and how to perform various hygiene tasks.
- *Taking Care of Myself, A Hygiene, Puberty, and Personal Curriculum for*
Young People with Autism by Mary Wrobel; Future Horizons, 2003. Written by a teacher/speech-language pathologist, the book uses simple stories to demonstrate what to say and not to say when talking to your child about hygiene and puberty. The book addresses hygiene, modesty, body growth and development, menstruation, touching, personal safety, and more.

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