

How do I train my son/daughter to shower - the challenges we face and how he/she learns

Raising children often comes with a myriad of daily life routines and occurrences, which may become a force of habit. When it surrounds the subject of hygiene and cleanliness, showering should be a basic necessary skill to equip our child with. However, why is this routine basic skill that most of us take for granted that may seem like a chore or struggle for our child with autism?

Senior Occupational Therapist, Mr. Jit Kwan, explained there could be multiple factors that make bath time challenging. It can be sensory sensitivity, the child's lack of understanding of the need to shower, the concept of clean or dirty, etc. Bath time can be stressful, confusing, upsetting and a challenge for all parties involved. Not to mention the added concerns over safety.

Ms. Sivakuma, the mother of a 21-year-old client, shared her story. To overcome his negative reaction related to showering when her son was 8 years old, she used bathing videos of his favourite characters and sang his favourite song tunes with lyrics related to showering to help him to remain calm and to enjoy when she sprayed water over his body, soaping, and rinsing. By age 15, he was able to shower his head by himself after she spent a period placing her hand on his head to cushion the water impact. Ms. Sivakuma shared that it took her son 7 years to learn how to shower independently and she was glad that he journeyed well.

To help our special child to navigate through bath time with a minimal amount of emotional trauma and upsetting experiences, the OT team suggested the consideration of developing a showering plan and shared tips when training the child:

- To explore the type of soap products that the special child prefers – the different smells, brands, or types (bar or foam)
- Having a structured area where the showering items like soap, shampoo, and bath towels are placed enables the child to be independent at bath time.
- For effective learning, use the strategy that works best for the child – use modelling and visual supports, use simple instructions, and break the skill down into smaller steps.
- Use the hand-over-hand method if needed for a start, before fading to other types of prompts like verbal and gestures.
- Create a schedule and routine for showering, like upon reaching home, teach the child to shower immediately.
- Adult model showering in the bathroom with a swimsuit on

At Q & A, parents also asked for tips to resolve some common issues faced:

Q: How to stop my child from taking too long when showering?

A: One parent shared that she taught her son to count e.g. 1,2,...10 at each step. The therapist suggested using some disengagement strategies (e.g. timer, countdown, short video clips). It is important to use the strategy that works for your child.

Q: How to stop my child from playing with soap or soap bubbles?

A: Consider using a different type of soap (bar soap or other lotion, which is less foamy). One alternative is to consider putting the soap in a travel-size bottle.

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