

# Children's Early Years Occupational Therapy Service



## Bathing Tots

Bathing and hair washing advice and  
strategies for Parents/Guardians

### **Bathing difficulties for children**

Children with sensory modulation difficulties often find bathing a challenge to tolerate. The following strategies may support you and your child during this activity.

#### **1) Consider the environment**

Consider the bathroom environment and how this can be altered to provide a calming and relaxing experience. Dimming the bathroom lights, using calming scents and allowing your child to choose and use a fragrance they find acceptable can all reduce bath time challenges. Some children respond well to calming slow rhythmic music during bath time or singing bath time songs.

#### **3) Protect sensitive ears**

Soften any sounds that bounce between hard surfaces by having plenty of sound reducing fabric such as towels and bathrobes in the bathroom. If your child does not like the sound of running water then fill the tub with the door closed and your child out of the room so that the sounds of water filling the bathtub do not distress them.

#### **3) Provide heavy work before bathing**

Encourage your child to participate in some movement seeking or heavy work activities prior to bath time. This can help regulate a child's sensory system prior to bath time and therefore reduce bath time difficulties. For further information and guidance on sensory modulation activities please see the handout titled 'making sense of sensory behaviour).



#### **4) Routine**

It is important to prepare your child for the bath time experience and what is to be expected. Social stories can help children understand the stages of the task and make it more predictable. Visual timers can be beneficial as they allow you child to know when the task will start and end.

#### **5) Offer toys that keep your child engaged**

Bath toys can be a good distraction tool as well as a making bath time fun. Examples include cause and effect toys, wind-up toys, bath crayons and foam soap.

#### **6. Textures**

Massage your child with a wash cloth, bath mit or hand using firm maintain pressure prior to and during bath time.

Try placing a warm wet towel over your child shoulders during bath time and keep pouring warm water over them to help them feel warm and safe.

Some children like to be wrapped tightly in a large towel after their bath which can again help regulate them and make them feel secure.

#### **7) Think about moving bath time.**

If bath time is a distressing time for your child, consider moving this activity to a different time in the day.

#### **8) Temperature**

Consider your child's water temperature preferences. Start with luke-warm water and adjust from their if your child is not comfortable. Check your water heaters setting to make sure it are set to a maximum safe level as some children may be under-responsive to high/hot temperatures.

#### **9) Stability**

Help your child to feel safe and secure in the bath by sitting them on a non-slip bath mat or support.