

Children's Early Years Occupational Therapy Service



Smearing Tots

Advice and strategies for
Parents/Guardians

PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR SMEARING

The reason for a child or young person smearing their faeces can be either medically related, sensory related or behavioural related.

Reason for smearing	Examples of presentation
Medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child may be feeling unwell or reporting/appearing in pain. • Constipation. • The child may lack sensation when experiencing a bowel movement.
Sensory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toilet paper feels too harsh against the child's skin therefore the child may use their hands instead. • The child may enjoy the smell, texture or movement of arms when smearing.
Behavioural /Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child may be seeking attention or a response/reaction from those around them. This response may be directly connected to an action for example, may be displayed when the child is prevented from doing something they wish to do. • The child may not understand where the faeces need's to go.

It is beneficial to try and establish what is causing the child/young person to smear their faeces, so as to identify the most appropriate strategies to assist in managing this behaviour.

Things to consider (medical)

- If you suspect that the child/young person may be in pain or discomfort, discuss this issue with your G.P to establish whether there is a need for medical investigation.

Things to consider (Sensory/behavioural)

- Try different toilet papers to find one that may be softer against the skin and therefore easier to tolerate.
- If the child appears to dislike the sensation of toilet paper against their skin, replace the toilet paper with wet wipes. Wet wipes are softer against the skin and therefore easier to tolerate.
- Provide alternative stimulation for touch and smell. For touch you could provide something with a similar texture, for example, making crafts using paper machè, playing with gloop (created using cornflour and water), finger painting and playing with Playdough. For smell, you could provide a handkerchief scented with a strong smell such as perfume.
- Distract your child using an activity which they enjoy when smearing normally takes place.
- Try to be calm when dealing with smearing. Avoid having a strong reaction as this could reinforce the behaviour/act of smearing.
- Consider body stocking garments to prevent the child from accessing their faeces. Alternatively, using tight fitting undergarments or if the behaviour is occurring at bedtimes, a onesie suit placed on backwards with the zip located at the child's back will prevent them from accessing faeces.