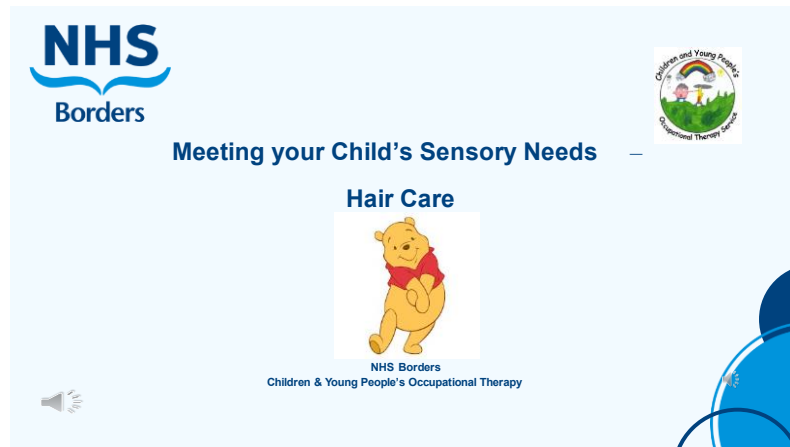


## Transcript



Welcome to our video in our mini-series Meeting your Child's sensory needs. In this video we shall look at some of the sensory behaviour your child may be displaying during hair care and provide strategies for you to try, helping you to meet their sensory needs.

Most children dislike having tangles brushed out of their hair, but for some children the sensation of having their hair brushed, cut or even touched is extremely unpleasant and can feel painful to them.

You may have noticed behaviours such as your child avoiding you when they see you with the hairbrush or begging you not to comb their hair. You may have had to shave their hair very short, so this didn't become a daily battle which can be very disruptive to their routine and anyone else in the home.



Our scalp can be a very sensitive area of our body. When your scalp is especially sensitive you are likely to try to avoid letting a hairdresser near your head so having a haircut can quickly become over alerting and lead to a meltdown.

As explained in our video mini-series on sensory integration and modulation, too much sensory feedback impacts on how your child feels, thinks, behaves and responds.

### Meeting sensory needs

It's important to try to work out how you can help to reduce or replace this feedback with a more positive sensory experience. We shall look at some of the sensory challenges they may be experiencing with hair care and provide

some strategies for you to try with your child. Remember we all have different sensory likes and dislikes, and your child will likely have different preferences to you and their siblings.

You know your child best and will already know a lot about what they like and dislike so use your existing knowledge to work with your child to try out different strategies.

Don't expect big changes overnight. It can take several months for sensory strategies to be used effectively. You will likely need to use the strategies you think work best, for you and your child, consistently for around 3 months before knowing for certain that they work.

Be prepared for them not to work each and every time so have a few sensory strategies that can be used in these situations.

For ideas to help with **hair washing**, please watch our video Bathing, showering and hair washing - meeting your child's sensory needs.

**Please remember that your child should be supervised at all times when taking part in the activities suggested in this video.**

### **Use A Secret (Lucy Jane Miller 2006)**

We introduced "A SECRET" by Lucy Jane Miller in our video "meeting your child's needs". This is a problem-solving tool for parents, teenagers and even for children themselves to think about the seven elements in sensory and motor challenges and to come up with some ideas of things to change to lead to smoother functioning for the child. A SECRET" is an acronym for these seven elements: attention, sensation, emotional regulation, culture, relationship, environment and task. A SECRET is not a rigid formula for what to do, but a flexible format helping you to consider each of these important elements in turn.

The sensation element is only one part of "a secret". Think about how each of these elements could be influencing the behaviour and how or if these could be manipulated to allow your child to function smoothly. For example, when having a haircut you could provide them with a distraction, cut their hair very short to prevent knots or change who cuts their hair to someone who understands their sensory needs.

### **Now let's think about S (sensation)**

The first step when considering S for sensation, is to closely observe your child's reactions, looking for consistencies in their sensory response and ask yourself which sensory system is being over stimulated? We will look at each sensory system which may be involved, giving you some questions to ask yourself and practical suggestions for things to try. It may take a few attempts

before you notice any change. If there is no change, go back and look at the other elements in A SECRET. You may need to try a combination of strategies and elements to help meet your child's needs by reducing or replacing the feedback with a more positive sensory experience.



When considering the touch sensory system ask yourself these questions

- Does your child dislike the feeling of their hair being brushed?
- Do they refuse to allow people to touch their hair?

Try these strategies for the touch sensory system or experiment with your own.

- Always touch on the child's terms. Ensure they are as calm as possible and ready to accept yours or someone else's touch.
- Avoid light touch. Always touch gently but firmly and ensure they can see you.
- Wherever possible, use a towel or clothing in between your hand and their skin until they can tolerate more direct touch. Be aware their neck may also be very sensitive to touch.
- Give a head massage using firm pressure in a shampooing action before brushing or cutting as this can prepare the scalp and make it less sensitive. You can teach your child how to give themselves a massage or rub down firmly with a towel prior to hair cutting.
- Distract them with toys around the sink area or a fidget toy. When sitting for a haircut, they can try squeezing a stress ball or hug their teddy.
- Hold hair close to the scalp or place your other hand on their head to limit the tugging feeling.
- Air blow away all the bits of hair after cutting to avoid irritation on skin.
- As chewing can be calming, try chewy snacks or a sensory chew to lower alertness levels.



can be gentler.

- Warm water temperature offers calming sensory input so brush their hair when they are still in the bath, using conditioner to help detangle.
- Use a vibrating hairbrush. Vibration can reduce the sensitivity so try pressing it firmly to the scalp before brushing or cutting.
- Use a large tooth comb or a brush with fewer bristles that are more spaced apart, as this



- At times when your child is calm, increase their tolerance by holding small sections of hair and gently tugging. This mimics the sensations involved in cutting hair.
- Give them control. Self-administered touch feels different than someone else touching us. Encourage them to brush their own hair when appropriate. This also helps to encourage their independence.



Their sense of smell may also be over stimulated, making them feel dysregulated. Strong smells from hair dyes, hairsprays, and other products are prevalent in hairdressers and barbers' shops with those we use at home lingering in bathrooms. You may need to take a note of what you smell and observe their behaviours when this changes, to work out if smell is making them distressed. Look for these signs.

- Does your child refuse to enter a hairdressers / barber's shop or the bathroom when hair care products are used?
- Do they cover their nose when entering?
- Do they mention the smell of the room?
- Do they dislike the smell of any hair products you use?
- 

You can try to

- When possible, open a window to disperse smells from bathrooms.
- Sit near the door or window in the hairdressers or barbers.
- Schedule hair cut appointments to when the shop will be quieter and less smells may be around or when your child tends to be calmer.
- Use calming, deep pressure strategies to decrease alertness such as weighted toys or chewy toys they could take with them when getting haircut.
- Explore their sense of smell by allowing them opportunities to smell a wide range of smells e.g., essential oils, products with fruity, sour or savoury smells. What do they like? Explore products they find less alerting.
- Use a smell they like on a tissue. They can smell this instead to cover up other less pleasant smells.





Hair care can be very noisy so you may have noticed them becoming over alert when they hear the hairdryer, scissors snipping or clippers.

- Do they cover their ears to muffle the noise?
- Do they start to make a loud noise during these times?

If so

- Provide a noise blocking or muffling technique through either wax earplugs or playing soft, soothing tunes such as spa music through earphones.
- Use a count down and when you get to zero, the noise stops. Then start again when they can tolerate it.



When considering their vision sense ask yourself: -

- Is the salon/barbers busy with bright lights and lots of visual distractions?
- At home do they avoid you at the sight of their hairbrush or hairdryer?

### Try

- To schedule appointments when the salon isn't busy.
- Dim the lights.
- Let them choose their own hairbrush or comb.
  - Use a visual timer to show them how much longer the task will last.
  - During the task, distract them with their favourite TV show or video.



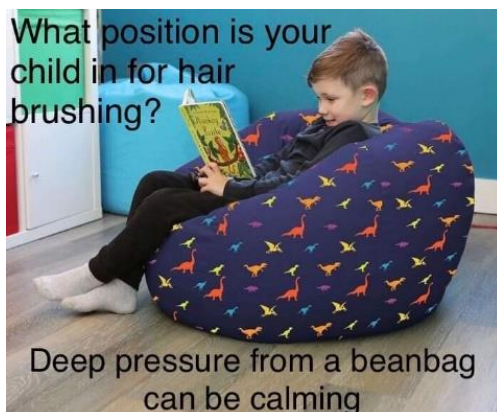


Look for these signs that their vestibular system may be receiving too much feedback.

- Does your child feel dizzy from the tugging sensation?
- Does their head drop back with slightest tug?
- Do they feel unsafe or frightened when standing or sitting unsupported during these tasks?
- 

If you see these signs, experiment with these strategies.

- Limit the tugging sensation by keeping their head stabilised. Place your other hand on their head when brushing. If they have longer hair, hold sections of hair to minimise tugging on the scalp and brush from the bottom.
- Have your child sit on a chair with their feet supported.
- Use a beanbag chair which wraps around them, providing deep pressure. If you don't have a beanbag, squidge your child with heavy cushions to provide the deep pressure for extra stability which they may find calming.
- Seat your child in your lap and provide sustained deep pressure.
- If brushing their own hair, ask your child to lean their elbows against a surface to provide them with stability and achieve greater strength.
- 





Their proprioception system may also be over alerting them. If so, they may complain you are pulling too hard when you are brushing gently.

Try to:-

- Give them control by letting them brush their own hair. They are in charge of the pressure, pace and how they work the knots out. If too young, let them help to apply conditioner/oil or hold the brush/comb.
- Let them brush your hair. Talk to them about how it feels to you and if they need to be gentler or firmer.

## General tips for Hair Care

Here are some general tips to help with hair care.



Comb conditioner through hair before rinsing to reduce tangles

Comb conditioner through hair before rinsing to reduce tangles. It is gentler to comb rather than brush damp hair.



Loosely pleating your child's hair before bed can avoid tangles in the morning

Loosely pleating long hair or putting into a top knot before bed can avoid tangles in the morning.



Squeeze your child's hair dry rather than rubbing. Try a hair towel turban wrap

Squeeze your child's hair dry rather than rubbing. Try a hair towel turban wrap.



Heavy wheat bag shoulder wrap gives calming pressure

Listen to music to reduce the noise of brushing. Heavy bag of rice on lap is calming

You can combine strategies. Provide them with a mixture of deep calming pressure through a heavy wheat bag shoulder wrap, heavy bag of rice on their lap and add music through headphones to reduce the noise of brushing.



Use a social story about any of the activities that your child has challenges with. The story talks about what's going to happen, how it will feel and the appropriate social responses that your child should have with the activity. Read the story to them when they are calm and then right before completing the hair cut to maximise its effect. Our colleagues on Speech and Language have created a story to support hair cutting. Go to their webpage on the NHS borders for their free download.

## Games to Support

- Turn hair brushing into a game – they can earn points for each stroke or set of strokes!
- Sing a silly song – there are a few options on YouTube if you need inspiration.



- Let them brush your hair. Talk to them about being gentle, what they can do if they find a knot, how you may be feeling. for example, calm, clean and ready for the day!
- Styling heads let them practice brushing and styling hair.



## Remember

Everyone has different sensory responses to stimuli. By thinking of your child's sensory systems and observing how they react to small changes, you can gain a better understanding why your child may be feeling, thinking or behaving differently to sensory feedback.

There will likely be times when your strategy doesn't work so have a toolbox full of strategies to dip into as needed.

Give time for strategies to work. Through consistently implementing the strategies they respond well to; you will help them to find a more positive sensory experience and meet their sensory needs.

Thank you for watching. We have hopefully suggested some strategies throughout this video you may wish to try.

We have a pyramid problem solving tool on our website that you can download which may be useful for you. This problem-solving tool helps us to think about the behaviour and the possible underlying sensory causes. By putting the problem at the very top of the triangle then starting to think about each of the sensory systems below, you may be able to identify if there is a



sensory reason for the problem. At the bottom of the pyramid, you list the strategies you wish to try.

In this example for toothbrushing, using the problem of tantrums when it's time to brush teeth, we have given examples of the sensory systems that might be receiving too much feedback and strategies you can use to change that, such as trying alternative toothpaste and a vibrating toothbrush.

Once you have tried our suggestions consistently for a while and feel you want to talk through strategies or need support to help implement these, please contact us using our enquiry line or enquiry email inbox.



# How To Contact Us...



**Prior to contacting the service, we suggest you explore our resources online and on Facebook;**

 [www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/cypot](http://www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/cypot)

 @CYPOTNHSBorders  
[www.facebook.com/CYPOTNHSBorders](http://www.facebook.com/CYPOTNHSBorders)

**Advice and support can be sought from the service by contacting the team directly using our Enquiry Line or via our Enquiry Email Inbox.**

 01896 826033 (voicemail)

 [Paediatric.OTEnquiries@borders.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:Paediatric.OTEnquiries@borders.scot.nhs.uk)

**We will aim to contact you within 5 working days to discuss your enquiry**