

Teeth & Hair Brushing Advice Home Pack

Green Lane School & Shine Therapy

Why can this be difficult for young people to engage with?

A lot of young people find it challenging to cope with having their hair and teeth brushed due to difficulties processing and integrating sensory input. Some young people may experience differences within their tactile sensory system. This means that they may find it challenging to tolerate tactile input and/or seek out more of it throughout their day.

Young people that present as 'over responsive' to tactile input may seek to avoid touch from others or find it challenging to engage in touching particular items/textures. This is because they receive a lot more of this sensory input than others may do, for example if someone tapped someone with tactile differences on the shoulder, they may perceive this as painful and unpleasant. However, to others, it may have felt like a light tap.

Therefore, having your teeth or hair brushed can be uncomfortable for these young people and they may therefore seek to avoid it.

And / Or

- Some young people may not understand why it is important to engage in these activities and refuse to do so due to this.
- Some young people may not find engagement in the tasks intrinsically motivating.
- Some young people may find it challenging to engage in tasks such as brushing their teeth due to underlying dental factors.

Sensory Advice

In order to support young people in tolerating tactile input a gradual approach needs to be taken. This involves helping the young persons to understand that tactile input is not of threat to them, over time they may then produce a different response to tactile stimuli. An increase in tactile input throughout their day over a prolonged time period may support with this. When referring to tactile input, this refers to a range of different textures and materials, more tailored OT advice may likely be required in this process.

With teeth brushing, something to consider is the toothbrush itself. Does the young person struggle to tolerate vibration and therefore find an electric toothbrush distressing? Has a manual toothbrush been trialled? Other alternatives such as a finger toothbrush, three-sided toothbrush or a 'u' toothbrush may be beneficial to trial. In regard to hair, it may be beneficial to also trial different types of brushes / combs as some are softer or firmer than others.

Prior to teeth brushing and hair brushing, it may be beneficial to provide the young person with calming (proprioceptive input), to help regulate their central nervous system. In terms of teeth brushing, massaging along the jaw line / mouth area may be beneficial to complete. Regarding hair brushing, try providing massages to the head area and working up to then using a hairbrush.

Additional Strategies

- Ensure dental checks are up to date.
- Trial a social story around the importance of brushing hair / teeth to help the young person to understand this.
- When supporting young people to engage in these tasks, do so in front of a mirror so that the tactile input is then more predictable.
- There are various tooth brushing apps available to make this more 'fun' for young people.
- Can a sand timer be used to show the young person how long hair/teeth brushing will last for?