

Teaching Hygiene Skills Tip Sheet

Rationale:

Parents are able to provide various opportunities for learning within the home. Many skills are practiced and reinforced at home by parents. Learning appropriate hygiene skills are no exception as children are expected to understand cultural norms and values of the society in which they live. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) require more intervention and practice in learning and maintaining new skills, and providing opportunities for acquiring good hygiene skills is critical to other areas of development, in particular social skills. Using visuals to practice good hygiene can be effective tools to improving skills (Pilebro & Backman, 2005).

Benefits:

- Children may be able to perform daily hygiene tasks independently (e.g., tooth brushing, hand washing, and bathing).
- Typical children at home can take leadership roles in assisting their sibling with ASD develop and maintain good hygiene skills.

Prerequisites:

- Able to attend to visual stimuli (e.g. pictures, PCS).
- Has competent fine and gross motor ability to perform hygiene skills.
- Is the skill's expectation developmentally appropriate
- Demonstrates imitation skills

Preparation:

- Prepare visual schedules to break down hygiene tasks into steps.
- Post visual schedules and prompts in the home near areas where hygiene skills will be practiced (e.g., in the bathroom, bedroom, or kitchen).
- Develop social narratives about hygiene skills which will reinforce and teach your child how to take proper care of themselves and their environment.

How to Teach:

- Provide access to posted schedules and visuals regarding hygiene skills and spend time teaching your child the steps involved in the process (e.g., hand washing schedule – 1) Go to sink 2) Turn on tap 3) Put soap on hands 4) Scrub hands under running water 5) Rinse hands 6) Turn off tap 7) Dry hands.
- Provide positive reinforcement for tasks well done (e.g., “Great job wiping your face”, “You washed your hands. Now it’s time for lunch”).
- Spend time reading social narratives with your child regarding good hygiene skills and allow your child independent access to the stories and visuals.
- Fade your prompts quickly and allow your child to practice independently. Eventually fade visual schedules your child becomes more successful.
- Be sure to generalize hygiene skills to various people and places (e.g., different sinks in the home, at school, daycare, different tables, and different rooms).

Common Difficulties:

- Sensory sensitivities (e.g., putting toothbrush into their mouth, texture of the toothpaste)
- Child dependence on prompts may inhibit independence.

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- Generalizing to different locations and objects for example, being able to perform the task with different objects or in varying places (e.g., in the bathroom sink or in the kitchen sink).

Samples:



References

- Crissey, P. (2004). *Personal Hygiene? What's That Got to do with Me?* London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Gray, C. (2000). *The New Social Story Book*. Arlington: Future Horizons Inc.
- Pilebro, C., & Backman, B. (2005). Teaching oral hygiene to children with autism. *International Journal of Pediatric Dentistry*, 15, 1-9.
- Wrobel, M. (2003). *Taking Care of Myself: A Hygiene, Puberty, and Personal Curriculum for Young People with Autism*. Arlington: Future Horizons Inc.

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