

Bathing: What to do when your child hates baths or showers

Contrary to popular belief, it is not necessary to bathe children every day unless there are special medical or sanitary reasons to do so. Rather than bathe, use a washcloth or wet wipes (which can be kept in a warmer) to zap any dirty areas daily, and schedule an unavoidable bath time for one or more days each week consistently.

Other helpful bath time tips include:

- Use a large sponge or loofah sponge and rub firmly to decrease defensiveness
- Before bath time, do resistive exercises or activities that provide deep proprioceptive input
- Have the bath water drawn before having the child undress. Make the transition from undressing and getting into the tub as quick and as smooth as possible. Keep the bathroom temperature warm and have them dress while still in the bathroom.
- The space of a bathtub can be overwhelming, try seating smaller children inside a laundry basket placed in the tub.
- If the child dislikes having his/her face washed, encourage him/her to wash himself/herself. Self-imposed touch produces a less defensive reaction.
- Use fragrance-free soap, as well as sensitive skin brands
- If the child is showering, use a hand-held nozzle. Let the child control the direction and force of the water. This can be especially helpful during hair washing for children who are afraid of the big shower.
- Use a large towel, and quickly and firmly wrap the child in it. Avoid exposure of the wet skin to the air; the light touch may trigger an adverse reaction.
- Provide deep-touch towelings to the extremities, hands and feet to decrease defensiveness. If the child will tolerate it, provide a firm massage, using lotion to avoid skin irritation.
- Institute a schedule for older children or even allow gym-class showers to suffice during the school year.
- Some children who will not go near the bathtub, but have no problem with swimming, often means a mandatory shower.
- In warm weather, try having them run through a lawn sprinkler in shorts or a bathing suit. The novelty of pools and sprinklers may diminish the fear of getting wet.

Sensory Survival Copyrighted 2007

Janet Wright, MS, OTR