

Haircuts: making them easy for your child

Does your child protest about having their hair cut? This is quite common. Many children find haircuts scary or unpleasant.

Some possible reasons your child might not like haircuts are:

- Sensitivity to touch around their head
- Sensitivity to things like unfamiliar noises (people, clippers, dryers), bright lights, strong smells, or itchiness from the cut hair
- Difficulty sitting still
- Fear about being hurt
- Not knowing what to expect.



Planning your child's haircut:

Prepare the environment

- Would your child prefer to visit the hairdresser or could they have a home cut? Will your child manage better in a smaller, quieter hairdressing salon or at home in front of their favourite DVD?
- Consider how your child will be seated for the haircut. Would they feel more secure with their feet supported? Could they sit in a parent's lap? Would they like to sit in front of a large mirror so they can see what is happening?
- Consider scissors versus electric clippers. Some children find the sound or sensation of the clippers distressing; however, some children dislike the light and tickly sensation of the scissors.
- If you decide to go to a hairdresser, talk to the hairdresser about your child's needs before you visit.
- If your child has trouble sitting still, make sure there are distractions available such as a favourite toy, storybook, food they really like, a DVD or music.
- If your child is very sensitive around the head, use brief, positive daily opportunities to touch their head and hair. This may be through play, hair brushing, or songs such as "Heads and Shoulders." Keep it enjoyable—if your child becomes distressed, stop immediately.

Help your child know what to expect

- Allow your child to watch family members have their hair cut.
- Allow your child to become familiar with the items used, where safe to do so. For example, if you intend to use clippers, let your child hold them and turn them on and off before the haircut, while you supervise.
- If your child likes pretend play, try playing hairdressers with their dolls/ teddies. Be prepared for a few toys to lose their hair!
- Read stories or use apps (applications) to help your child learn about haircuts.

Making a visit to the hairdresser as easy and positive as possible

- Choose a time of day which is best for your child. Avoid times when they might be tired or hungry.
- Keep it simple! If possible just do the haircut, rather than adding other steps like hair washing or a blow dry to the experience.
- Arrange for your child to have a short play time to get comfortable in the salon before they are expected to sit still for their haircut.
- Think about whether there are parts of a haircut your child dislikes, that could be eliminated. For example, if your child dislikes the water spray bottle ask the hairdresser to do a dry cut instead.
- Prickly hair can be very irritating. Try removing stray hairs by wiping your child's face and neck with a warm damp face washer after the haircut, or consider changing their shirt or jumper to remove any loose hairs that might be prickling them.
- If your child understands timers, give them a timer to hold to show how long the haircut will take.
- Be positive. You may want to provide a reward or praise, to acknowledge their cooperation with a process they dislike.

Resources about haircuts

If your child likes stories or picture books, find them a story about getting a haircut. Read this at home to prepare them for what to expect when they get their haircut. Some suggestions:

- *Hattie, Get a Haircut!* by Jenna Glatzer
- *Sprinkles' First Haircut* by JC Schwanda
- *Going To The Hairdressers: A Guide For Children With Autism And Asperger Syndrome* by Laura Slade

Search for apps (applications) about haircuts, such as:

- *Model me Going Places* is a free app that includes a story about a boy going to the hairdresser.

