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## HOW TO HELP A CHILD TOLERATE BATH TIME

For some children, bath time is scary and painful. It is often a time when uncomfortable things are done to an unexpected child who does not understand what is going on. Not knowing what is coming next can be frightening, and not having a choice can be frustrating. There are sensory issues involved as well. Children will not all react the same way to bath time, and if a child has difficulty with baths, it may be necessary to use a variety of different approaches before a child learns to tolerate bath time. What works for one child may not work for another, but it may be worth trying.

- Encourage the child to watch a parent go through the bathing routine happily. Have him/her play the grown-up, for example, getting Mommy's hair wet or rubbing in the shampoo. Let the child watch another take a shower, feeling the water as desired. Some children actually prefer a shower.
- Have the child help with different "baths" around the house. Talk about washing a pot or pan as "giving it a bath" or "washing it's hair" and let her help. Practice giving a bath to or washing hair of a doll or a favorite toy.
- Warn the child that bath time is coming. Reassure him/her that it will be "OK" but that it is time for a bath.
- Try playing some of the child's favourite songs on a tape player in the bathroom during bath time. This may keep the child calm and may make bathing/hairwashing a more positive experience.
- Let the child help turn the water on. Watching a tub fill with bubbles can be fun but once in the tub it can make it harder for to know where the water is. If the child knows it is bath time and sees the tub fill, encourage the child to take the first steps into the tub independently. While the tub is filling, incorporate deep sensory input as the child gets undressed. For example, help the

child undress, seated in your lap, while you give body contact and firm pressure. Try very deep rubs along trunk, arms, and legs. (Start near middle of body and move out toward extremity.) Similarly, firm rubs with a soft towel may be desensitizing.

- Provide an assortment of bath toys, soaps, and scrubbers. Washcloths, sponges, soft brushes, or various scrubbers may be more or less preferred. Let the child select the toys and throw them in. Having one special toy (ie. a special bathtime Barney) that is only used at bath time might also be a good idea. Strong smelling soap or shampoo may be a real turnoff to a sensitive child. Foam soap can be fun.
- Some children can learn to enjoy bath time, or at least parts of it. Tablets are available that colour bath water without staining child or tub. These tablets are generally with the bubble bath and have been spotted at **Super Store** (*Aqua Blast*) and **Army-Navy** (*Little Critters Bath Fizzers*). The *Little Critters Bath Fizzers* have also been seen at **London Drug** and **Zellers**. **Zellers** also sells *Little Critters Finger Paint* for the bath or *Fun Foam* for the bath.
- Try to find the ideal temperature for your child. With a couple of basins, see if the child prefers to play in the warmer or cooler one, and then narrow it down some more.
- Allow the child to help with washing his/her own hair if possible. Let the child get used to the water and being wet for a while before attempting hair washing. You may use brisk rubs or finger massage to desensitize the scalp. Use a wet hand on the head during water play to start getting the hair wet. The child can learn to use a rolled up dry washcloth over the eyes during rinsing.
- Provide a large bath towel for a tight warm wrap-up afterward.
- Always follow with a rewarding activity or treat.

Please feel free to contact your occupational therapist with questions or concerns. If you are not sure who to ask, call the phone number on the top of page one and ask to talk to an OT who can help you.

SI-Bathtime Ideas.pages