



## Fox Wood School OT Ideas



### Ideas to assist with tolerance of Hair Brushing and Cutting

#### Why does my child hate having their hair brushed or cut?

Hair brushing, washing and cutting can be an activity that feels like torture to a child. The pulling on the scalp, the feel of the bristles, the rush of the morning routine, the significant amount of touch involved can be just overwhelming for some of our children. To help you problem solve, here are some possible reasons why they might be struggling:

- Some of our children hate tipping their head back or forwards as they can feel unbalanced, uneasy and fearful. Feeling comfortable doing this requires our vestibular sense to be working effectively (the sense that controls the knowledge of our head position and motion).
- Your child may have an overly sensitive scalp or are generally sensitive to touch, this particularly makes any imposed touch very difficult for them to tolerate and tends to cause a fight or flight response.
- Some children may struggle with the sounds imposed with hair care - clippers, hair dryer, scissors or even the sound of the hair brush.
- Consider as well the smells of shampoo, hair gel or spray that maybe used.

Please remember that the ideas and activities in this programme will not work for all children as we all respond and react to sensory input differently. Lots of ideas have been provided so that there hopefully will be some ideas that will work for your child.

**If you are concerned that any of the activities or tips pose a risk to your child, please do not attempt.**

#### Generic Tips

- Consider when it is best to try and brush hair. Try not to do it when you are in a rush or there are considerable demands on your child as they will not tolerate it well. Could you brush their hair in the evening when they are calm and plait it for the next day
- Getting them to see and watch you brush your hair is really important so that they see that it isn't a scary or negative process.
- Consider using a social story to talk through the process with them. Try watching on the internet children brushing their hair and/or reading stories about hair brushing, cutting. Free Social Story - <https://able2learn.com/products/i-can-brush-comb-hair-social-story-pages-6.html>
- Consider different types of hair brushes -
  - Wet brushes - used when hair is wet - [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Wet-Brush-Original-Detangler-Purple/dp/B00821ZHMK/ref=asc\\_df\\_B00821ZHMK/?tag=bingshoppinga-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=&hvpos=&hvnetw=o&hvrand=&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=e&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=&hvtargid=pla-4583795261494433&psc=1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Wet-Brush-Original-Detangler-Purple/dp/B00821ZHMK/ref=asc_df_B00821ZHMK/?tag=bingshoppinga-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=&hvpos=&hvnetw=o&hvrand=&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=e&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=&hvtargid=pla-4583795261494433&psc=1)
  - Paddle brush - good for massaging the scalp and detangling. - [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Wet-Brush-Original-Detangler-Purple/dp/B00821ZHMK/ref=asc\\_df\\_B00821ZHMK/?tag=bingshoppinga-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=&hvpos=&hvnetw=o&hvrand=&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=e&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=&hvtargid=pla-4583795261494433&psc=1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Wet-Brush-Original-Detangler-Purple/dp/B00821ZHMK/ref=asc_df_B00821ZHMK/?tag=bingshoppinga-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=&hvpos=&hvnetw=o&hvrand=&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=e&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=&hvtargid=pla-4583795261494433&psc=1)



- Detanglers - [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Wet-Brush-Original-Detangler-Purple/dp/B00821ZHMK/ref=asc\\_df\\_B00821ZHMK/?tag=bingshoppinga-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=&hvpos=&hvnetw=o&hvrnd=&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=e&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=&hvtargid=pla-4583795261494433&psc=1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Wet-Brush-Original-Detangler-Purple/dp/B00821ZHMK/ref=asc_df_B00821ZHMK/?tag=bingshoppinga-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=&hvpos=&hvnetw=o&hvrnd=&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=e&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=&hvtargid=pla-4583795261494433&psc=1)
- Wide tooth comb - [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Wet-Brush-Original-Detangler-Purple/dp/B00821ZHMK/ref=asc\\_df\\_B00821ZHMK/?tag=bingshoppinga-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=&hvpos=&hvnetw=o&hvrnd=&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=e&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=&hvtargid=pla-4583795261494433&psc=1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Wet-Brush-Original-Detangler-Purple/dp/B00821ZHMK/ref=asc_df_B00821ZHMK/?tag=bingshoppinga-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=&hvpos=&hvnetw=o&hvrnd=&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=e&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=&hvtargid=pla-4583795261494433&psc=1)
- Vibrating brushes - Some children love vibration and a vibrating hair brush can provide with clear predictable touch input. - [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Wet-Brush-Original-Detangler-Purple/dp/B00821ZHMK/ref=asc\\_df\\_B00821ZHMK/?tag=bingshoppinga-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=&hvpos=&hvnetw=o&hvrnd=&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=e&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=&hvtargid=pla-4583795261494433&psc=1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Wet-Brush-Original-Detangler-Purple/dp/B00821ZHMK/ref=asc_df_B00821ZHMK/?tag=bingshoppinga-21&linkCode=df0&hvadid=&hvpos=&hvnetw=o&hvrnd=&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=e&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=&hvtargid=pla-4583795261494433&psc=1)

- Get them to practice brushing your hair. Take turns to do each others if they will tolerate, or they can do one stroke of your hair and then they brush one stroke of theirs.
- Use a known quick song or counting to 10, is a great way to engage your child and help them to understand how long they have to brush and when it will be finished.
- When hair brushing with your child, encourage them to be an active participant and hold the hair brush whilst you guide them. If they won't allow you to help, consider that any engagement with hair brushing is good and that with repeated practice their abilities will improve!
- Create a consistent and predictable routine so that they know when they need to brush their hair using a daily routine chart.
- Think about whether you can use different products to assist with brushing. Conditioners can be purchased to detangle and detangler spray can work a treat. Make sure that the smell is something that they like.



### **Preparation before Hairbrushing**

Often our children like firm deep pressure touch and muscle resistance activities to assist with calming them (not all children!). Below are a few ideas of things you can do prior to hair brushing to try in order for them to be in the best place to cope with the sensory demands of hair brushing;

- Give them a big bear hug or encourage them to hug themselves tightly.
- If small enough encourage them onto your lap and bring their legs and up and give them a tight hug around them.
- Using firm consistent pressure place your hands either side of their head and give a short squeezes. You can give firm squeezes to shoulders and arms using a cupped hand.
- Where tolerated provide a scalp massage but make sure this is firm and not tickly!
- Think about positioning for hair brushing - if they like a bean bag and a heavy rug encourage them to sit in this. Some children like to push their faces into something such as a liked bear, peanut ball or their hands. Could they sit somewhere and push their feet into a resistive surface - wall, side of sofa, therapy ball. They may prefer the comfort of your lap too!
- Find different items that they can squeeze and squish between their fingers and in their hands.
- Consider distraction, if you know they like a particular cartoon or a book then use this.
- Make sure your child is aware that you are going to brush their hair as if you don't give them warning the fight or flight reaction is likely to happen.
- Consider whether brushing their hair might be tolerated better when having a bath as they maybe more calm and tolerant from the sensory benefits of the



water. They can also where possible be encourage to sit across the bath and push their feet into the side of the bath helping both with stability but also the sensory benefits of deep pressure and muscle resistance.

### **Techniques for Hair brushing**

- Leave different brushes out for them to experiment with and use on your/their hair.
- Where possible, encourage them to brush their hair as they are more likely to tolerate this.
- Use firm downward consistent strokes when brushing (light strokes are less likely to be tolerated).
- Get them to count out loud the number for the strokes you are going to do - start low!
- Hold the top of the hair near to the scalp in a pony tail and brush the bottom of the hair, particularly if the hair is matted.
- If there is a big knot try and use lots of detangler spray and your fingers to work through the knot and hold tightly above the knot to prevent tugging on the scalp.
- Provide something in their hands to fiddle with and squeeze.

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