



## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

### Personal Hygiene

Families living with autism spectrum disorder often look for tips on how to handle the many different challenges that may arise. “Real Life Tips for Kids with Autism” is a series of practical videos and resources presented by the experts at Children’s Specialized Hospital.

Personal hygiene is important for everyone. It’s important for your health, it’s important for socialization and for employment. When wondering what type of personal hygiene skills to teach, think about what kids of a particular age are expected to do in terms of the independence of their self help skills and that’s where you can start gearing your teachings. It may take time to learn personal hygiene skills and especially to achieve a certain level of independence. That’s why it’s important to start early and to practice, practice, practice.

Visual supports can be really helpful because there is not a whole lot of language that’s required for teaching. Also, it can take some of the power struggle out of it and when I talk about visual supports, there is a lot of different ways that you can go. You could have something like a checklist, like this, that shows, that the person could review to say, “Okay let’s see do my clothes match? Do I smell nice? Are my teeth brushed and clean?” So, and this could be personalized. You could use something like creating a social story and using photographs. It’s especially good to take photographs of the child or the adult doing each step of the personal hygiene task and then you could just organize it and point to it and the person could, if it’s in a book form, they could review it and go over and over again again to practice it that way. You could create your own list which you could laminate, or you could put in a plastic sleeve and it doesn’t have to be fancy and again you could use the photographs of the person or you could use like clip art, cartoon art. If the person is a reader, you don’t necessarily even need to use the picture you could just have what the task is and the steps of the task and then you could just check off as you go along.

For younger kids and especially when the task is new, it’s important to also have frequent use of reinforcers that are meaningful and interesting to the person. So you could offer reinforcement as each step is completed of the personal hygiene task. Or eventually you could just have the reinforcer at the end when the task is completed and you’ll get to the point where the person doesn’t necessarily need a reinforcer, but in the beginning it could be really helpful.

You might stand behind the person holding the toothbrush and maybe, hand over hand showing the person what to do, hand over hand turning on the water, putting the toothpaste on and so forth, but eventually you want to fade the type of prompts that you use. So you might fade it from a physical prompt to maybe just a picture, we talked about visual cues, to a word, or to a gesture.

Whenever possible, it’s a great idea to get the person involved in making some choices and selections related to personal hygiene. So, go shopping and have the person pick out what kind of soap, shampoo, deodorant, what type of towel they want to use and this is especially important because of some of the sensory issues that many people on the autism spectrum have.

When teaching personal hygiene skills ,it could be really helpful to parents with a rhyme or a song because that helps to maintain pace and could make it fun. It also could help with memory of remembering what each of the steps are. So, one of the things that we do when washing our hands is maybe to sing the happy birthday song once or twice. That also helps the person to know how long they should have their hands under the water and using the soap to make sure that they are doing a thorough job. Sometimes people use timers when they are teaching a particular task. It shows how long the task should take and it also gets away from nagging and using a lot of words and reminders, “ do this keep going keep going.”

It could be really helpful to use a basket where you have the soap, the toothpaste and the toothbrush and maybe a comb and a brush, you put it on one side of the sink and as the person completes each skill ,they can put that item in the basket on the other side. It serves as a reminder of what needs to be done and when you have completed all of the tasks.

So when we are talking about puberty, it’s really important to teach the puberty skills before the child actually reaches puberty. Part of it is it’s important for the person to know what to expect as their body changes before the body actually starts changing. So some of the things that would be important to know is again what to expect from the body, such things such as the growth of breasts, the growth of the size of the penis, body hair and then you could go into what to do about that.

If you’re uncomfortable talking about puberty, you could use... there are many great books that are out there or also visual aids and videos that you could use to help you get the point across. The changes that occur during puberty can be frightening for the person and also uncomfortable, frightening maybe embarrassing for their family. Even if you’re not comfortable talking about such things as masturbation, wet dreams, menstruation, breast growth, if you’re not comfortable, find somebody else who might be comfortable talking about it because knowledge is really important and not having that knowledge is just going to potentially increase that person’s anxiety.

Even for people who will not be able to take care of themselves independently, it’s important for the person to be able to guide who helps them with their hygiene skills and when and where that occurs, so be thinking of whether you would want to be having somebody of the same sex to be involved and which relatives or which caregivers would be most comfortable to assist that person.

Everybody has a right for privacy and that includes people who might not be able to independently take care of their hygiene. Make sure that some of these hygiene tasks occur in a bathroom behind a closed door, in a bedroom behind a closed door. There is no reason for someone to be dressed out in public or in the living room when there is people coming and going. Many of the personal hygiene tasks can be built into a student’s I.E.P, whether this is something that is worked on in the classroom or through therapy such as occupational therapy, speech therapy and it’s great to have a partnership with the school program as well as the home and other places that the person is going to be because personal hygiene occurs everywhere, school, home and out in the community. Good personal hygiene shows that you care about yourself and you care about others.



Through a partnership with Kohl's Cares, Children's Specialized Hospital is improving access to care for children with special health care needs.



[RWJBH.org/CSH](http://RWJBH.org/CSH)