

A More Comfortable Haircut

Tips for families of autistic children

Haircuts can be challenging for some autistic children because of sensory differences, unfamiliar environments, changes in routine, or the experience of having someone touch their hair and head. Planning ahead and making small adjustments can help make haircuts more comfortable and manageable.

Think About What May be Difficult

Before the appointment, consider what your child might find uncomfortable:

- Sounds or Vibrations from clippers
- Scissors near the ears or face
- Hair falling on the neck or skin
- Water, shampoo, or hair products
- Bright lights or a busy salon
- Sitting still for a long time
- Someone touching their head, face, or ears
- An unfamiliar person or environment



Make the Experience Predictable

Knowing what to expect can make new experiences easier.

Things to try:

- Use a visual sequence or social story
- Show pictures or videos of the salon or haircut
- Visit the salon before the appointment
- Explain what will - and won't - happen
- Let your child know that it is ok to take breaks



Find a Good Fit

The right stylist can make a big difference.

When scheduling, consider asking:

- Do you have experience working with autistic children?
- Can we come during a quieter time?
- Can we visit beforehand?
- Can my child take breaks?
- Can my child sit somewhere other than the salon chair?
- Can I stay with my child?



Give Your Child Choices

Small choices can help your child feel more in control.

Offer 2-3 choices that can be honored:

- Blue or Black cape?
- Scissors or clippers?
- Mirror or tablet?
- Break now or after this section?



Support Your Child's Sensory Needs

Think about what helps your child feel comfortable.

Your child might benefit from:

- Headphones or earplugs
- Favorite video or music
- Comfort item
- Fidget or favorite toy
- Minimal or unscented products



Watch for Signs of Overwhelm

Your child may communicate discomfort through behavior rather than words.

Look for:

- Covering ears
- Pulling away
- Increased movement
- Crying or yelling
- Trying to leave



If Your Child Can't Finish, That's Okay

There is no single "right" wasy to get a haircut

Things to consider:

- Try cutting only the most important areas.
- Do the haircut in shorter sessions
- Try getting their hair cut at home
- Try letting your child's hair grow longer
- Try scissors instead of clippers - or vice versa



After the Haircut

Celebrate the experience, not just the finished haircut

Think about the experience and reflect:

- What worked well?
- What was difficult?
- What should you try next time?

