Everyday Advocacy

Going to the Hairdresser

Haircuts can feel overwhelming for some autistic children and youth because of sounds, smells, touch, waiting, or changes in routine. Planning ahead and working with the hairdresser can help make the experience more positive and comfortable.

Before the appointment:

Try to find a salon that offers sensory-friendly services, quiet hours, or are familiar with working with children. Call ahead and ask if the hairstylist is comfortable working with a child who may need extra time, breaks, or supports such as noise-canceling headphones.

You can also help your child become familiar with the salon before the haircut by:



Visiting the salon to explore the space.



Meeting the hairstylist without expecting a haircut.



Sitting in the salon chair to feel more comfortable with the environment.

Tip: Watch Autism Ontario's going to the hairdresser video together to learn about the haircut process and help your child feel more prepared for their appointment.

Talk to the hairstylist beforehand about your child's sensory needs, fears, or sensitivities. You can ask for accommodations such as:

- Shorter appointments
- Extra time
- A slower introduction to haircut tools
- Frequent breaks
- Explain what will happen before each step and offer choices

Tip: Consider practicing the steps of getting a haircut at home ahead of time as well. For more information visit "Supporting Successful Appointments: Going to the Hairdresser"

During the appointment:

Bring familiar comfort items that help your child feel safe, such as:

- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Fidgets
- Sunglasses
- A weighted lap pad
- A favorite comfort item or book
- Snacks



Small changes can make haircuts more comfortable. You can ask the hairdresser to:

- Use a soft brush to brush away itchy hair.
- Give the child the brush to use on themselves if possible.
- Choose a cape that feels comfortable around the neck.
- Start with scissors only if clippers are too loud.
- Allow screen time or other distractions if helpful.
- Take breaks whenever needed.

> Help your child feel calm by explaining each step, offer praise and encouragement such as, “You’re doing a great job sitting still” throughout the haircut.

Watch for signs that they may be overwhelmed.
If needed, slow down, take a break, or stop the haircut. Your child’s comfort and emotional well-being are most important. It is okay to leave with an unfinished haircut and try again another day.

After the appointment:

Once the haircut is finished, celebrate the success, even if only part of the haircut was completed. Praise your child and, if tolerated, show them their haircut in the mirror.

Take time to think about what worked well and what was difficult.



Keep notes about:

- Preferred hairstylists
- Best appointment times
- Helpful sensory supports
- Communication strategies that worked well

These notes can make future haircuts easier and more successful over time.