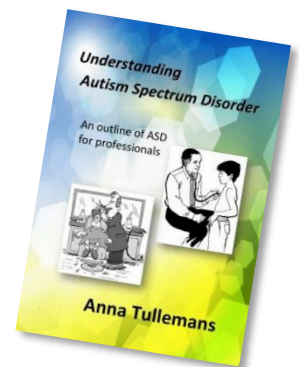




Hairdresser

This is an excerpt from the book:

Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder: an outline for professionals



Going to a hairdressing appointment may cause sensory stimulation and overload. Following are some suggestions and ideas to try to make the visit a positive experience for both the hairdresser and the client.

Going to the hairdressing salon usually means that all five senses of a person with Autism Spectrum will be assaulted at the same time. This may cause sensory overload and refusal to sit during the appointment and or other inappropriate behaviours.

One key person

Always allocate one key person to be in charge of the person with Autism Spectrum. A change in personnel can disorientate them and may cause **hyper activity** or **complete shutdown**.

Appointments

- Make first or last appointments of the day. People with Autism Spectrum find waiting in a different and busy environment difficult. First or last appointments mean there will be less people walking around and talking. Also the first appointment means less smells to contend with
- Perhaps the child and carer can wait in the car until the appointed time

Some of the sensory issues may include:

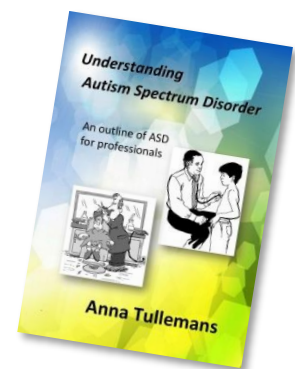
- Bright lights in the salon
 - Allow them to wear sunglasses
- Smells of shampoo, conditioner and room fragrances
 - Use 'no scent' products
 - Use the same shampoo as at home (familiar smells are easier to cope with)



- Sounds in the salon
 - Turn the music off, even the quiet stuff
 - Give the child earphones to listen to their own music or story
- Washing their hair maybe overwhelming touch for the child with Autism Spectrum.
 - Damp down hair instead or allow the child to spray themselves with the water
- Hairdryers
 - turn them off until needed
- Scissors near their ears
 - Wear earphones to distract
- Visual overload
 - Place the child in a chair where he can't see anyone else
 - Draw a curtain around them

Touch

Many people with Autism Spectrum experience difficulties with touch. Touch can be very painful for someone with Autism Spectrum which can make having a haircut very difficult. Personal space is another issue. A hairdresser may need to stand very close and brush up against the client which can make them feel very uncomfortable.



- The feel of the nylon or plastic cover which covers the shoulders and arms may be overwhelming
 - You may need to put armholes in the covering. Some Autism Spectrum children may feel that their arms are being cut off if they can't see them
 - Use a cloth covering instead
- Feel of hair falling onto face and neck
 - Use a damp cloth to remove the hair. Don't use the brush

Children with Autism Spectrum may find the following very difficult in a hairdressing salon:

- Brushing hair
 - Be firm but not hard
 - Allow the child to brush their own hair to get them used to the feel of the brush on their head
- The use of clippers
 - Vibration of clippers
 - Show the child how you turn them on and let them feel them
 - Allow the child to feel the vibration on his hands and cheeks first
- Brushing up against the child while you are cutting his hair
 - If possible, try to avoid as light touch may feel very painful
- Body awareness and balance could be a problem when sitting in a high chair

- Make sure their feet are resting on a stool or allow their feet to touch the floor

Work with parents to prepare a visual of the visit. Take photos of the salon, chair, hairdresser etc and paste into a booklet. This will make an excellent social story.

Let the child touch, feel, and see any equipment before using it.

Allow the child a guided visit to /see/hear/smell/touch the salon before their appointment.

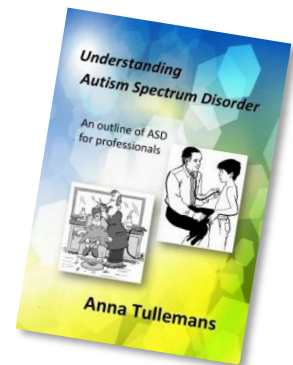
Language

People with Autism Spectrum are very literal in their interpretation of language and in consequence you must use clear unambiguous language.

- They may not react to or understand facial expressions and body language that we use on a daily basis.
- If you use metaphors or puns, you must explain these to ensure understanding
 - For example, 'I laughed my head off'. The child will be looking for your head on the floor
- Don't ask '*Can you sit down?*' when you really mean '*please sit on the chair*'. They are more than likely to say 'yes', and not sit down, meaning they **can** sit down however they don't feel like it.

Extra solutions can include:

- Video others having haircuts and talk to the child about what is going to happen
 - Include in the video, arriving, and leaving the salon
- Role-play the whole scene without actually undergoing a haircut. Children with Autism Spectrum respond well to activities they have practiced and have become familiar with
- Use social stories to explain what is going to happen and create a personalised story
 - Use photos of child sitting in chair, with scissors near their head and ears, brushing of hair etc.
 - Use a sequence of pictures/photos to show what is going to happen next (Now, Next, Later visual available from www.annatullemans.com)
 - The hairdresser can give a verbal cue to go with the photos about what is going to happen next
- Parents can use a visual on a calendar to mark off the days leading up to an appointment
- Use a visual timer to show how long the appointment will last. Set the timer a little longer than is really required. Timers are available from www.annatullemans.com.au



Diversions

These are used to provide a diversion to distract the child to what is about to happen.

- Bring a favourite toy or book from home to hold on to
- Use a computer or iPad (you can upload the visual social story to this)
- Create a Sensory bag for the salon
 - A 'sensory bag' or 'sensory basket' could contain a selection of sensory items that the child can access at each visit. It may help them manage stress, anxiety and sensory overload.
 - Suggestions include:
 - Stress balls, stretchy items, squishy balls, hard wooden fidget toys, weighted rice bags. These are all available from www.annatulleman.com.au

Bring a change of clothes

When the haircut is finished there may still be hair on the skin to annoy the child.

- Bring a fresh change of clothes to change into
- Use a damp cloth to brush hair away any lingering hairs

