



Strategies and Advice for Nail Cutting

Why does my child hate having their nails cut?

If your child is sensitive to touch, then nail cutting can feel very uncomfortable to them and a scary prospect. Our fingers have lots of sensory receptors to help us use our hands and fingers in a skilled manner. If our child is struggling to process and interpret touch information effectively then they are likely to push you away and flee from the activity. Also you need to consider that someone coming towards you with scissors, when they are unlikely to understand what you are going to do is understandably a scary scenario!



This generic programme aims to provide you with ideas and activities, however they will not all work for all children, as we all respond and react to sensory input differently. Lots of ideas have been provided so that hopefully there will be some ideas that will work for your child.

If your child is attempting nail cutting, then they need to be supervised at all times. If you are concerned that any of the activities or tips pose a risk to your child, please do not attempt.

Generic Tips

- Timing is key! It is always best to approach this activity when your child is at their calmest so that they are in the best possible state to cope with potentially uncomfortable touch input. Could it be sitting watching a favourite cartoon, after they have had a bath, coming back from a walk or play in the playground.
- Getting them to see and watch you cut your nails with no pressure on cutting theirs 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 having their nails cut and/or reading stories about nail cutting.
- Consider different types of nail cutting tools -
 - Child friendly nail clippers
 - Easy grip clippers
 - Nail files
 - Electric nail files
 - Different types of nail scissors.
- Consider whether it's the sound of the nail clippers that are bothering them - if so could you get them to listen/watch their favourite songs/cartoons/films with headphones.
- Consider talking to them about the different things to use when cutting nails, get them to play with the items (under very close supervision).
- Start to build up interest in nail and toe care. Try using a foot spa for them to put their feet/hands in.
- If they will tolerate a foot/ hand massage try this. Use firm pressure either with or without cream depending on what they will tolerate. Remember to be mindful of the smell of the cream as they may be sensitive to smell too!
- Always consider distraction thinking about activities they love doing. Don't cover up that you are going to cut their nails.
- You can use counting to help them know how long you are going to be i.e. count 10 - 1 for each finger to be cut.



- Try and create a consistent and predictable routine for nail cutting. Its not something you have to do on a daily basis, but try and perhaps make it a weekly task after something that you tend to do every weekend.

Preparation before Nail cutting

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 nail cutting to help them to be in the best place to cope with the sensory demands of nail cutting;

- Pressure and resistance activities through the hands and shoulders can help;
 - Give them a big bear hug or encourage them to hug themselves tightly.
 - Putting your hands/feet against the wall and pretending to push the wall down. If they're small enough get them to try and push you over with their hands.
 - Rubbing their hands together.
 - Using squeeze balls, playdoh (if tolerated).
 - Pushing their hands down on the top of a table service.
 - Hand/foot massage with or without cream.
 - Sometimes vibration can help prior and during nail cutting - holding a vibrating bug in their hands or a back massager.
- Think about where best to do the nail cutting. Could they be in the bath with their feet pressed firmly into the bath side (sitting across the bath). Could they be sitting on the sofa with their feet pressed into the sofa arm. Could you sit on the floor with you behind them and their feet pressed into the wall. By pressing their feet or hands firmly into something this gives them deep pressure through the most sensitive part of their hands/feet therefore making the nail cutting less tickly and uncomfortable. Equally sitting in a beanbag with a nice snuggly heavy blanket may work too.



Techniques for Nail cutting

- Before attempting to cut a nail try applying firm pressure to the bottom of the nail bed on the top and underneath the finger or toe.
- Consider how much you cut of the nail as if too short it maybe bothersome to them, exposing too much of the underneath skin which is sensitive.
- Try and just do one cut for each nail minimising the number of snips you do to each toe and count as you go along.
- Be calm and reassuring, if your stressed they will be too.



Developing Nail cutting independence

Building up children's abilities in nail cutting can help them to feel in control and minimise uncomfortable sensations. Explore using easy grip nail clippers and getting them to practice on your nails first. Working on general scissor skills will help to improve their proficiency and accuracy.

References

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