

Smearing

Advice & Support for:

Overview

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Smearing - a guide for all audiences

The reasons for smearing

The reason an autistic person might smear their faeces could be medical, sensory or behavioural and include:

feeling unwell or in pain

being reluctant to wipe because toilet paper is too harsh

not knowing where faeces need to go

seeking out sensation from texture, smell or movement of arms during smearing action

seeking attention/wanting a reaction

fear of toilets.

What you can do

You could try to:

visit the GP or dentist to make sure that there are no physical reasons involved, like being in pain

replace toilet paper with wet wipes, or a tepid shower

teach them the wiping process, 'hand over hand' ie putting your hand on top of their hand as they wipe

provide an alternative with a similar texture, eg papier-mâché, Gelli Baff, gloop (corn flour and water), finger painting, play-dough

provide alternative activities at times when the smearing usually takes place

make a structured timetable of the day, showing times when the person can do appropriate smearing activities

avoid asking the person to clear up after themselves, or telling them off, as this may reinforce the behaviour

use minimal interaction, avoid paying too much attention or showing too much reaction

set up a toileting routine.

Further information

Toilet training and the autism spectrum, Eve Fleming and Lorraine MacAlister, 2015.

[Challenging Behaviour Foundation](#), 0300 666 0126.

For help with behavioural issues, please contact the [Autism Helpline](#).

Article sources

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