

Nail-Care

Sensory processing differences can be one of multiple factors that contribute to self-care difficulties. Children may have difficulties processing sensory aspects of the environment such as noise or smell or processing the internal sensations. Whilst some children may refuse to cut their nails, others may avoid or become distressed, due to their sensory experiences.

The following ideas are designed to help address these challenges. When using them, consider your child's age, any potential risks and their sensory preferences. Reflect on how to adapt these strategies to best support your child in feeling calm and relaxed during nailcare activities.

Area of difficulty	Strategy	Tick when strategy has been tried and add comments
Child avoids or refuses to cut their nails.	Demonstrate nail cutting to support your child in understanding the process of cutting nails.	
	Use verbal or visual cues (e.g. an alarm clock or countdown) as a reminder of the beginning/end of the task.	
	Use visuals to break the task down and remind them of the order of each step.	
	Use "now and next" motivators e.g. "first we will cut your nails, then you can play your game."	
	Gradually increase your child's tolerance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold your hand out, wait for your child to give you, their hand. Provide firm pressure on finger. And then practice putting clipper to fingernail saying 'clip' then remove hand and repeat to build confidence 	
	Create an inviting environment for your child. You may want to consider getting your child to listen or watch something they enjoy, as both a motivator and distraction during the task. They may like to sit in a big beanbag or snuggle under a blanket.	
	Use social stories™: These can help your child understand the process of cutting nails and why we need to. Further information on social stories™ available at: Social Stories - Carol Gray - Social Stories (carolgraysocialstories.com)	
	Try using a nail file instead, as your child may find this more tolerable than nail cutting	

Child becomes distressed by nail cutting.	Massage your child's hands before cutting their nails.	
	Use firm pressure whilst holding their hand to cut their nails.	
	Before cutting, try soaking your child's nails in warm water or when in the bath, as this makes the nails softer.	
	Create a calming environment based on your child's sensory preferences e.g. reduce lighting, play calming music, reduce noise etc.	
	Consider encouraging your child to watch or listen to something they enjoy as a distraction.	
	Have your child positioned between your legs and squeeze them firmly between your knees to provide deep pressure.	

Useful resources:

Visual supports for nail cutting: [cutting fingernails \(eput.nhs.uk\)](http://eput.nhs.uk)

Sensory processing guidance: [Home – Nail cutting – Sensory Processing \(humber.nhs.uk\)](http://humber.nhs.uk)