

# Personal hygiene

TITLE  
**03**



# Personal hygiene

This unit aims to enhance the learners’ understanding and use of cleanliness habits and practices that they will carry into adulthood. Personal responsibility and autonomy in this regard is encouraged, while accepting that some learners will always require adult support.

The activities are suggestions only as there remains the need to carefully plan and personalise learning experiences. When you know a learner well you will be aware of how they communicate whether that be with behaviour, body language, speech or vocalisation or

using aids such as photographs, symbols or signs or other technology available to them. You can adapt or extend what is suggested to suit your learner’s age, cognitive ability and specific needs.



Links to Curriculum for Excellence	Learning intentions	Success criteria
<p>I am learning what I can do to look after my body and who can help me. <a href="#">HWB 0-48a/ HWB 1-48a</a></p> <p>I can describe the physical and emotional changes during puberty, understand why they are taking place and the importance of personal hygiene. <a href="#">HWB 2-48a</a></p>	<p>With the appropriate level of support and resources children and young people learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ About aspects of body cleanliness and maintenance of personal appearance. This includes:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Hand washing, bathing or showering (all parts of the body and hair).</li><li>- The practice of oral hygiene.</li><li>- The practice of wearing clean clothing, including underwear.</li><li>- Maintaining personal appearance: hair, nails.</li><li>- Maintaining hygienic practices when going to the toilet.</li></ul></li><li>▶ Which adults will help them to look after their personal hygiene.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ I can identify things I can do to maintain good hygiene habits and practices with regard to:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Hand- washing</li><li>- Having a bath/shower</li><li>- Washing and cutting my hair</li><li>- Brushing my teeth</li><li>- Having clean/trimmed nails (hands and feet)</li><li>- Foot hygiene</li><li>- Wearing clean clothes/ underwear.</li><li>- Going to the toilet</li></ul></li><li>▶ I can follow steps (prompted or unprompted) to undertake these familiar routines.</li><li>▶ I can identify which familiar adults help me to maintain good personal hygiene.</li></ul>

### Links to other themes

Learning within these other thematic units will support learning on this theme:

- ▶ My Body
- ▶ Puberty



## Why this learning matters

Children and young people need to learn about body cleanliness and maintenance of personal appearance so that we can work with them to promote independence and good physical and mental wellbeing. **In the pages that follow we look at activities that support the learner on specific tasks, but firstly it is worth framing these with some general points about how we support children and young people around this theme.**

- ▶ When planning learning activities, the expectations we have regarding personal hygiene should be age appropriate. For example, small children can begin to learn to wash their hands and brush their teeth with parental support, although they will still require assistance with bathing, showering and dressing. Whilst acknowledging the support some young people will always need, we can build understanding, choice and skills.
- ▶ While some hygiene practices will be done at school much of what we do in terms of personal hygiene happens in the home - when the child or young person gets up in the morning and gets ready for school, when they are getting ready for bed. Establishing habits and maximising independence will require good communication between home and school so that we give consistent messages, as early as possible, using the same language and with the same expectations.
- ▶ By its nature, the practices we address here may entail building the child or young person's tolerance for an activity or the sensory experiences associated with it - thinking about the smells, textures, noises that might be encountered.
- ▶ In all our RSHP units we talk about the importance of adult/child communication. This might entail explaining what is happening, it could be offering the child or young person choice, it means waiting for consent or for a choice to be made. This can be difficult when time is pressing or a task requires to be done. As adults, as much as is practically possible, we need to stop ourselves from taking over doing something for the child, or for that matter interrupting if they are making an effort but not necessarily doing it well enough (from our point of view).
- ▶ For the hygiene tasks described here, a child/young person may require some level of support to complete the whole sequence or parts of it. When the adult knows the child then much repeated tasks might see increased capacity and independence.
- ▶ When a hygiene task is important, for example brushing one's teeth, it can help to offer some motivation - *You can brush your teeth now and then get some computer time.* We can also offer positive choices for after the task is done - *After you brush your teeth you can.... or you can...*
- ▶ For learners who are supported by more sensory approaches this area of RSHP curriculum lends itself to some creative ways to support learning. The smells of certain things can be used to signify when a personal hygiene task is to be done - the smell of soap can mean wash your hands, the smell of shower gel means its shower time. Alternatively something more tactile can be the signifier, a face-cloth, a sponge. It is important there is consistency in sensory supports used in this way, across time and between settings of home, school or respite/services.

## Activities, ideas and supports for learning

Personal hygiene is about how we care for our body. In this unit we explore all the different practices and routines that we would expect everyone to do.

### There are 9 sections:

1. Hand- washing
2. Having a bath/shower
3. Washing and cutting my hair
4. Hair growth and removal
5. Brushing my teeth
6. Having clean/trimmed nails (hands and feet)
7. Foot hygiene
8. Wearing clean clothes/underwear
9. Going to the toilet



## 1. Hand- washing

It may be that with Covid many children and young people have become very used to handwashing or using antibacterial gel – such practices, now established, can be maintained post-pandemic. If this is not the case then time may be required to help the learner become used to the smells and textures of soap or gel and allow them to build tolerance and indicate some preference. Of course hand hygiene is something that can and should be modelled by all adults – explaining/verbalising as we do so. Where support is given, for example with taps or soap dispenser, always communicate what is being done. When establishing routines look for the learner anticipating next steps and cooperating with them. In this unit folder you will find posters and graphics to display next to hand-washing areas.

### A hand-washing song

To the tune of *Here we go round the mulberry bush*.  
You can make up further lines for rinsing and drying your hands:

*This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands,  
wash our hands.*

*This is the way we wash our hands, to scrub away the germs.*

*This is the way we use the soap, use the soap, use the soap.*

*This is the way we use the soap, to scrub away the germs... .*

**There are 6 stages that you can teach through modelling, direction and practice:**

- ▶ **Wet with water**
- ▶ **Add soap**
- ▶ **Rub and scrub**
- ▶ **Wash (for 20 seconds)**
- ▶ **Rinse**
- ▶ **Dry**

## 2. Having a bath/shower

When it comes to showering or bathing, families can have different rules. Children and young people, particularly as they reach their teenage years, will likely benefit from a daily shower or bath but this will need to be discussed with them and their parents/carers.

### Personal Hygiene bags/What do I need?

Each learner will have personal preferences for smells or textures, they can choose items that personalise their routine – soaps or gels they like, sponges or cloths they prefer. Pop everything in their own bag with their name/photograph. Showing or sharing the bag can signify it is time to wash or shower. The bag will need to be on hand where tasks are done.

It may be necessary to build tolerance of antiperspirants. Roll-ons may be preferred and you can practice with them (supporting the hands to hold) rolling on to surfaces, then on hands, then under arms. If sprays are used, again take time to use a spray on surfaces or on parts of the body before it is used under arms.

### Washing/Shower checklist

Use the props or images from the My Body unit to identify which parts of the body the child or young person should wash when in the shower or bath. Print off pictures and label those areas that need to be cleaned – laminate and hang in the bathroom with the title My Shower or My Bath – and use it to help learn names of parts of the body and plan and review how the young person showers or bathes. For children and young people who require assistance use the images to talk through which parts of the body they can wash, and which you will help them clean. If the child or young person can wash themselves, they should be encouraged to shut the door to maintain privacy whilst bathing.





### 3. Washing and cutting my hair

Children and young people, particularly as they reach their teenage years, will likely benefit from washing their hair at least two or three times a week, but this will need to be discussed with them and their parents/carers.

The head is particularly sensitive to touch and hair washing and haircuts can be confusing or distressing for some children and young people. If we seek to build a positive self-image, and that every child has the right to be well presented, we can work on this.

#### Building levels of comfort and tolerance

Some ways to build levels of comfort around hair washing, cutting or styling include: touch should be gentle but firm, approach the child/young person from a direction that they can see you coming, build tolerance by touching through a towel, keep talking about what you are doing, massage the scalp before washing or cutting, have the child/young person sit on their hands (applying a deep pressure through their legs or hands), give time limits or count down when nearing the end of the task, use earphones or earplugs if noise is distressing, dim lights and keep noise to a minimum, allow the child/young person to hold an item they find comforting. (Adapted from [KIDS - Kids Independently Developing Skills](#) | NHS GGC)

#### Come to the salon

In the development of this resource Rosslyn School (Fife) told us about setting up a hairdresser salon in the school. Children and young people can visit to watch, become accustomed to sounds and smells and processes and then engage at whatever level they are comfortable. **Read more about Sharon's Salon in the unit folder.**

### 4. Hair growth and removal

Hair growth is a noticeable change that will happen to a young person at puberty. Keeping or removing hair is a personal choice but some young people can be distressed by hair growth in some places. In the supporting resources for this unit there is further information on this provided by the Australian programme called Planet Puberty.

### 5. Brushing my teeth

We should expect that children and young people will brush their teeth at least twice a day. Families may also use floss or antibacterial mouthwash, their suitability for the children or young people in your group can be discussed.

As with all personal hygiene practices it is important to structure routines carefully. If the child/young person is resistant to toothbrushing address this over time – perhaps you could brush a dolls mouth/teeth, or build tolerance of flavours, the feeling of a brush. Check the images and animations that are part of this unit's resources. Many schools use and adapt material from Childsmile: [Childsmile - NHS Health Scotland \(child-smile.org.uk\)](#)



### 5. Having clean/trimmed nails (hands and feet)

We want children to learn to keep nails clipped and clean. As children grow they can take on tasks that ensure nail hygiene, with support if necessary. Nails are easier to clip after a shower or bath. As with other personal hygiene routines, children and young people may need to build tolerance of trimming nails.

#### Hand and foot massage

Massage can have comforting and relaxing effects on people. Talking with allied health professionals will help you identify how these can be used.

#### Visit the nail bar

Just as we suggested establishing a hair salon in the school, you could also set up a nail bar and provide a service to each child/young person.

### 6. Foot hygiene

Foot hygiene can be especially important if learners have poor circulation, or use boots or foot wear that increase sweating. Working with allied health professionals you can explore how spas and massage might bring benefits to children and young people including pain relief, relaxation and a general sense of wellbeing.







## 8. Going to the toilet

Independence when toileting would mean the child or young person is:

1. Aware they need to go to urinate or have a bowel movement
2. They can communicate this need
3. They are aware that the toilet is the place to go to urinate/have a bowel movement
4. They are aware that they should close doors for privacy
5. They can get on and off the toilet as necessary (or stand at it to urinate)
6. They can manage their clothes in doing so (only open/remove clothing when in the bathroom)
7. They can wipe their bottom
8. They can flush the toilet
9. They can wash their hands.

The child/young person may manage any one or more of these elements – progress may not be linear, the intent would be that through communication, direction, practice and reinforcement the child does what they can and receives support where they need it, and only when they need it.

You can establish a signifier for going to the toilet, this can be used by the learner or by an adult to ask whether the child or young person wants to go. This should be the same at school as it is at home.

Some learners will require support in changing pads/nappies. This degree of personal care should be accompanied by the kind of support from adults that we discuss in other units (see *My Body* and *Personal Space and Boundaries*) so with respect, consent and optimal levels of privacy and dignity.

Going to the toilet should also be a time to further practice and embed hand-washing.

## 7. Wearing clean clothes/underwear

Good personal hygiene requires us to change clothing regularly, including a daily change of underwear. Children, young people and families may need support to understand that bodily cleanliness can be undermined if clothing/underwear are not also fresh and clean.

### Looking smart

In the unit on *My Body* we suggested that work with mirrors was one way to help children and young people understand the notion of *this is my body*. Mirrors can also be used to reflect on aspects of personal appearance, highlighting what the child or young person is wearing, that they have styled their hair, that they have a new t-shirt... all with the intent of acknowledging individuality and choices/preferences they are making about how they look.

### Pants for days of the week

A fun way to establish the practice of changing your pants every day is to label them Monday, Tuesday....

## And finally....

### I can indicate to an adult if I am upset

Children/young people may be upset about aspects of their body, body changes and the need to follow practices relating to personal hygiene and cleanliness. The My Circle exercise described in the unit called Personal Space and Boundaries can support children and young people to identify who they can tell if they are upset. Of course it is also the responsibility of adults who provide education and care to know the learner and to be aware of changes in behaviours that might communicate worry or distress.

### Learner evaluation

Learners should be asked to show a preference as to whether they like or dislike the activities that are part of their RSHP learning. It may be possible to tell if the child/young person is enjoying their participation as it happens, this is facilitated when the adult knows the learner well and is able to interpret reactions. Whether at school or at home, you may have already worked on developing an object of reference or signifier for when you want to know a child/young person's opinion. Learner evaluation will help you to make learning more enjoyable, relevant and useful for the learner.



