



**Successful
Haircuts for
Children
with Autism**

What is autism?

Autism is a neurological disorder that typically lasts throughout a person's lifetime. Autism affects the way an individual perceives the world, making communication and social interaction difficult. It may also result in repetitive behaviors or unusual or intense interests. The symptoms of autism, and their severity, can vary considerably in each individual on the autism spectrum. It is sometimes said: If you've seen one person with autism; you've seen one person with autism.

An individual with autism may display some or all of the following characteristics, which may represent challenges from a certain perspective, or strengths from another:

- Difficulty understanding language, gestures, and/or social cues
- Literal or excessive speech, often with a concentration on a particular topic
- Difficulty relating or participating in a back-and-forth conversation or interaction
- Social awkwardness
- Intense or unconventional interests
- Repetitive behaviors such as pacing or hand flapping or rocking
- More or less sensitivity to light, sound, smell, taste or touch than usual
- Anxiety, abnormal fears and/or lack of appropriate fear of real dangers
- Difficulty managing transitions, changes in routine, stress, frustration
- Strong visual skills
- Good rote and long term memory (facts, statistics, etc.)
- Adherence to rules, honesty
- Intense concentration or focus, especially on a preferred activity
- Understanding and retention of concrete concepts, patterns and rules
- Musical, mathematical, technological and/or artistic ability or interest

What can you do?

- Speak in a calm, low voice
- Do not surprise the child from behind
- Keep directions simple
- Wait for a response – some individuals with autism need time to process information and respond



For Parents & Caregivers

Before your child's haircut you may want to think about the following:

- Speak with the salon manager about just coming in so that your child can be acquainted with the environment.
- Schedule an appointment during a time when the salon is not as crowded so there are less distractions for the child with autism.
- Speak with the stylist before hand about any particular sensitivities that your child may have.
- Identify reinforcers or preferred items that your child likes. For some children it's a favorite toy or book, for others it's a treat. Your child can earn the item as a result of successfully completing the steps requested of the child. For some children this may mean all the steps necessary for getting a haircut, for others it may mean to complete a predetermined number of steps. As these steps are mastered more steps can be added until the haircut is successfully completed. It is important that the child is successful and has earned the reward at the end of the sessions. This way the experience may be remembered as positive.
- Take a digital picture of the reinforcer or preferred item to remind the child what he is earning.
- Review the steps of getting a haircut with your child (see the visual schedule on page 5 of this pamphlet).
- Practice the steps of getting a haircut with your child at home before bring your child in for a haircut.



Visual Schedule

Individuals with autism often benefit from visual supports and schedules. The following visual schedule outlines the steps necessary to get a haircut. Families are welcome to print the pictures and create a visual schedule for their child. Some families may print the page and check off the activities as they occur. The pages can be laminated and a dry erase marker can be used to check off each activity, this way the page can be reused for each visit. Others may cut out the photos and laminate them, and place Velcro on the back of each photo. The photos are arranged in chronological order on a board, as each step is completed the picture is removed.

Some children may need to be reinforced with verbal praise, a preferred item, or a treat after each step. Others may be able to complete some, many or all of the steps before verbal praise or a treat is given. Each child will need to work at their own pace to achieve the skills necessary to get a haircut.



Print this page to create a visual schedule for your child.



1 Go to salon



6 Feet flat on the bar



2 Check in



7 Spray comb with water



3 Meet stylist



8 Comb hair



4 Sit in chair



9 Trim hair



5 Hands on lap



10 Reward for a great job

Home care & Grooming

To make home hair care enjoyable for your child, here are some tips to ensure the experience goes smoothly:

- Show the shampoo to the child. Let the child smell and touch the shampoo. If you are going to use conditioner repeat the same process.
- For shampoo and bath time you will want to make this time fun but quick. Let the child have a bath toy to play with for comfort. Some families use a shampoo and body wash combination product (for example one of our Snip-its Tearless Shampoo and Body Wash products). This will make the process easier, with one multi-purpose product.
- Rinse the shampoo until the water runs clear.
- If the child is sensitive to having their hair combed, use a leave-in spray detangler. Using a detangling product means there is nothing to rinse out of the child's hair and it will make combing the hair easier.
- Comb the child's hair with a wide tooth comb, this will create less tension on the child's hair and be more comfortable for the child.
- If you are going to apply a styling product on the hair, repeat the process of showing them the product, let them smell and touch it and then apply the product to the hair.
- To dry the child's hair, show the child the blow dryer, and turn the dryer on to a warm setting (not high/hot) with a lower speed. Blow some warm air on the child's hands or arms so they can feel that it's warm and will not hurt. If the child is comfortable with the blow dryer, proceed with drying the hair.
- If you want to use a brush to assist with the drying, use a paddle or vent brush. These types of brushes will not put added tension on the hair. Help your child to be involved in their hair care routine.
- While brushing or combing longer hair, start by coming out the ends of the hair first and then slowly work your way up towards the scalp. This will help to gently remove and tangles and pulling on the hair.



About Autism Speaks™

Autism Speaks is dedicated to promoting solutions, across the spectrum and throughout the life span, for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. We do this through advocacy and support; increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism; and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions. Through partnerships and collaboration, we are committed to:

- Increasing global understanding and acceptance of people with autism
- Being a catalyst for research breakthroughs
- Increasing early childhood screening and timely interventions
- Improving the transition to adulthood
- Ensuring access to reliable information and services throughout the life span

To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit www.autismspeaks.org



About Us

About Snip-its®

Snip-its is an innovative hair care and branded entertainment concept designed specifically for kids. Snip-its salons feature colorful decor, a custom cast of animated cartoon characters, interactive computer game Play Stations, the 'Magic Box', and a complete line of hair care products specially formulated just for kids. Since 1995, Snip-its has changed the dynamic of children's hairdressing, turning what has been considered a traditionally mundane and often unpleasant experience into a fun-filled, animated adventure. Snip-its provides specialized training for all stylists to ensure top-quality haircuts, outstanding customer service, and a special certification program educating stylists to work with children who may have heightened sensitivity or anxiety toward haircuts.

For more information visit us at: www.snipits.com



About Us

About Melmark®

Established in 1998, *Melmark New England* is a private, community-based 501(c)(3) organization in Andover, Massachusetts, dedicated to serving children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder, acquired brain injury, neurological diseases and disorders, dual diagnosis and severe challenging behaviors. The program uses an interdisciplinary team approach based upon the science-based principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). *Melmark New England* provides educational, vocational, clinical, residential and consultative services, personally designed for each individual in an environment of warmth, care and respect. In close communication with families, *Melmark New England* works to develop and enhance the confidence and abilities of these students by providing a safe, motivating, challenging and nurturing environment that is clinically proficient and whose overriding goal is personal welfare of the students served. *Melmark New England's* parent organization, Melmark, Inc. in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, was established in 1966 by Paul and Mildred Krentel whose youngest daughter Melissa was born with Down's Syndrome. Melmark Inc. currently provides an extensive range of services to adults and children with Developmental Disabilities.

For more information visit us at: www.melmarkne.org

