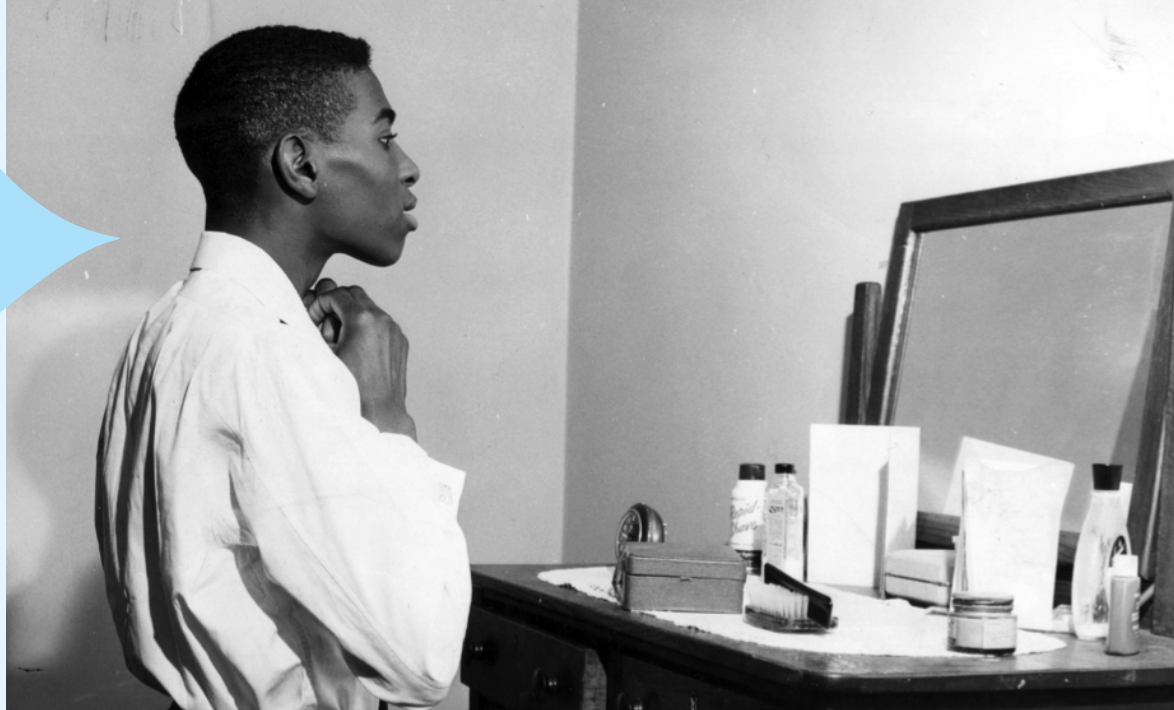


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**Autism at-a-Glance**  
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Center on  
Secondary Education for  
Students with ASD  
(CSESA)



## Hygiene in Adolescents with ASD

*Autism at-a-Glance* is a series of practitioner and family-friendly documents created by the Center on Secondary Education for Students with ASD (CSESA) designed for high school staff members supporting students on the autism spectrum, as well as family members of adolescents with ASD. The purpose of the *Autism at-a-Glance* series is to provide a current summary of topics relevant to high school students with ASD as well as practical tips and resources for school and community personnel and family members.

This *Autism at-a-Glance* was designed to support high school staff and family members in addressing hygiene skills with teens on the autism spectrum.

Families of adolescents with ASD, and school staff who support them, often report that maintaining good personal hygiene can be difficult for their sons, daughters, and students. Hygiene is the practice of keeping up with one's health and cleanliness. Maintenance of hygiene includes washing hands after going to the bathroom, using a tissue when blowing a nose, using deodorant, and many other skills. Poor hygiene impacts various aspects of one's life and the consequences of poor hygiene may impact health, social experiences (e.g. peers avoiding interaction), and employment. A teen experiencing adverse responses in his/her environment may not recognize his/her poor hygiene as the cause. As a result, some teens may internalize their negative feelings, which could lead to decreased self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.

### Potential Areas of Difficulty Contributing to Poor Hygiene

#### Sensory Challenges

Teens may have difficulty using certain items that are typically used to clean. Some may over-respond to certain items related to hygiene tasks, finding the physical contact, lights, or sounds during a hygiene routine to be unbearable (e.g., sound of an electronic toothbrush, the material of a towel, smell of a soap/lotion). Others may under-respond and not react even during pain (e.g., temperature of the water is too hot, cuts on the face when shaving).

#### Sequencing and Following Directions

Teens may struggle to remember the many steps needed to complete a hygiene task. They also may need more time than other teens in processing instructions. Transitioning to the next step of a hygiene routine without reminders or prompts can also be a challenge for some teens.

“Poor hygiene impacts various aspects of one’s life...”



## Potential Areas of Difficulty Contributing to Poor Hygiene (continued)

### Time Management

Teens may struggle to remember the many steps needed to complete a hygiene task. Teens may need more time to complete their hygiene routines. One may lose track of time in a particular step in the routine (e.g., continuing to stand in the shower for a long time before moving on to other steps). Transitioning to the next step of a hygiene routine without reminders/prompts can also be a challenge for some teens.

### Promote Healthy Hygiene Habits Early

It is important to begin healthy hygiene habits as early as possible. It may be helpful to consider beginning these healthy habits before puberty, which would contribute consistency to the teen’s daily schedule before and during the occurrence of hormone level changes. In turn, the teen will be learning skills that the steps towards maximizing independence.

Having discussions with the teen or finding ways to assist understanding will help alleviate confusion about changes in his/her body. Teach and utilize the formal names of body parts to aid in future conversations about hygiene and puberty. If needed, ask a professional for guidance or inclusion in the conversation. Including a

professional the teen knows and is comfortable talking with, such as a doctor, teacher, or therapist can serve as another resource.

### Important Reminders

Parents, teachers, and other people working with an individual with ASD on hygiene tasks need to respect the individual’s right to privacy. When practicing hygiene skills or having a discussion on a related topic with a teen, remember to be in a safe, private environment.

Additionally teachers and other professionals need to continue to be sensitive to matters within the home. It is important to recognize there are multiple factors that may impact a student’s level of hygiene when coming to school. Families with financial difficulties could have trouble consistently purchasing hygiene items and/or have limited access to washing machines (e.g., may be difficult to get to a laundromat).

Lastly, different families have different hygiene practices and expectations. Families, staff, and the teens with ASD may view hygiene needs differently so it is important to have an open dialogue between students, school staff and parents about hygiene.

## Suggestions for School Staff and Parents

### 1 Visual Supports

**Provide objects, pictures, or written cues to guide completion of a hygiene task.**

- Give cards depicting pictures of the step-by-step process of showering.
- Use a checklist of tasks to complete in the bathroom in the morning before school.
- Make a hygiene kit for the matching task (e.g., for brushing teeth, put a toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, and mouthwash in a kit).
- Many examples can be found here: [http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/index.php?pageld=3613&mode=mod\\_resources&action=display\\_category&resource\\_cat=15](http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/index.php?pageld=3613&mode=mod_resources&action=display_category&resource_cat=15)

### 2 Modeling

**Demonstrate the process of completing a hygiene task.**

- Brush your teeth and count out the length of time you spend on each section of teeth with the individual.

**Use a video model for teens who may need repeated viewing of the model.**

- Record video of modeling the steps of shaving.

### 3 Social Narratives

**Write descriptions of a social situation and include appropriate responses with reasoning.**

- Describe the morning routine and when to change into clean school attire for the day
- Write down some examples decisions about hygiene during and after meals - when to wipe off your face, what types of foods may require breath mints after a meal.





### 4 Reinforcement

**Identify activities that are motivating or preferred items and use learning hygiene skills as opportunities to engage with the activity or item.**

Note: Some teens may not perceive their hygiene problems as an issue (e.g., they personally are not bothered by not having showered in a week, so why would it matter to others).

- After completion of a hygiene routine (e.g., can spend 10 minutes on the iPad after completion, showering, putting on deodorant, brushing teeth).



<b>Get toothbrush and toothpaste</b> 	<b>Put toothpaste on toothbrush</b> 	<b>Brush teeth.</b> 	<b>Drink water.</b> 
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Example 1: Picture card to depict several steps of a hygiene routine

Task	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
Shower			
Wash hair with shampoo			
Wear clean clothes appropriate to weather			
Wear clean underwear and socks (1x means dirty/wash)			
Comb or brush hair (cut hair every month)			
Check fingernails, clean and trim if needed (about 1 time a week)			
Cut or file toenails (about 1 time a week)			
Brush teeth and floss AM			
Brush teeth and floss PM			
Deodorant daily			
Wipe until clean, change underwear if dirty daily			
Clean glasses daily			

Example 2: Checklist created by Indiana Resource Center for Autism



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## Resources

The Healthy Bodies Toolkit

<http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/healthybodies/>

Autism Speaks

<http://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2013/08/09/teen-autism-needs-help-hygiene-appropriate-behavior>

Children's Specialized Hospital

<http://www.childrens-specialized.org/CSRedsign/media/Autism/Tip%20Sheets/Real-Life-Tips-for-Kids-with-Autism-Personal-Hygiene.pdf>

Autism and Puberty: A Web-share Session from Indian Resource Center for Autism

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23oc04BVtN4>

Evidence-Based Practices:

Visual Supports

<http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/resources/ebp-briefs/visual-supports>

Modeling

<http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/resources/ebp-briefs/video-modeling>

Social Narratives

<http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/resources/ebp-briefs/social-narratives>

Reinforcement

<http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/resources/ebp-briefs/reinforcement>