



BATH TIME can be one of the most stressful times of the day for parents and children. Parents often struggle with making sure their children are safe and clean in a reasonable amount of time, and children often resist bath time altogether. Yet bathing oneself safely is an important developmental skill for children to learn as they become more independent.

The following tips are from pediatric occupational therapy practitioners who have experience helping parents and caregivers establish bath time routines that are safe, fun, and productive.

If you want to:

Be as safe as possible during bath time.

Consider these activity tips:

- Never leave a child unattended in the bath. It is best to be within arm's reach to avoid accidents. Wipe up any water spills as soon as possible and be sure that the soap isn't left on the floor to avoid slips.
- Water temperature should always be tested to avoid burns. Place the top of your hand in the running water to be sure it's not too hot or too cold, since this part of your hand is more sensitive than your palm.
- Cover the faucet with a foam noodle or a faucet cover to prevent injury if the child knocks against it, and use slip-resistant mats inside and outside of the bathtub or shower.
- Use a baby bathtub for infants and young children. Be sure your child is below the maximum weight limits for a particular tub (this information is on the label).

Prepare your child for a productive bath time.

- Before bath time, get out everything you need, including pajamas, towels, and soap.
- Encourage your child to help organize these items, which teaches him or her about responsibility and the importance of planning ahead. By allowing your child to select the towel, pajamas, toys, etc., he or she will feel more included while developing decision making and cooperation skills. It also prevents situations such as a forgotten towel, which leaves a child cold and wet (and takes the fun out of bath time!).

Address fear of the water.

- Some children are afraid of the sound of rushing water. You can help reduce this fear by filling the bathtub with water before the child enters the bathroom.
- Some children are afraid of being pulled down the drain. Have your child help fill up the bathtub and bathe a waterproof toy or doll. When you're done, leave the toy in the water and unplug the drain, then watch together to show that the toy does not get sucked away. Remind your child that he or she is much larger than the toy!
- Encourage children to play and put their faces in the water and blow bubbles, with adult supervision.
- Put on your swim suit and get in the tub with your child. You can comfort him or her throughout the bath.

If you want to:

Consider these activity tips:

Make bath time fun.

- Give children time to put their hands in the sink water to prepare for bath time and learn that water play can be fun.
- Children do not need fancy bath toys to have a good time. Many kitchen utensils make great toys, such as using a measuring cup as a water scoop.
- Rotate bath toys so children don't get tired of the same ones.

Teach children how to bathe themselves.

- Ask children to give a plastic toy (doll or animal) a bath so they can practice the skills of cleaning and grooming.
- Encourage children to wash themselves while singing the name of the body part out loud. Create an entire song by adding more body parts.

Need More Information?

Pediatric occupational therapy practitioners promote participation of all children and their families in everyday activities (or occupations), including bath time routines. When there is a particular area of concern, the occupational therapy practitioner can create an individualized strategy based on the child, and family-specific needs. A series of tip sheets for families is available through the American Occupational Therapy Association at www.aota.org.

Occupational therapy is a skilled health, rehabilitation, and educational service that helps people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations).

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