

## • Desensitization to Nail Cutting •

*When cutting a child's nails there are three basic components that need desensitizing; he must get used to the clippers approaching his fingers, to the pressure that comes with cutting the nail and an adult holding his fingers. This can be very fearful for a child because he feels he has no control over what is coming towards him and even though the clippers do not hurt, there is pressure involved. Playing games that allow him to get used to the pressure, get used to an adult holding his fingers while something is approaching his fingers will gradually desensitize him to the various components of nail clipping as well as build trust with the adult clipping his nails.*

### **Suggestions:**

1. Play little games with him that involve his fingers to allow him to become accustomed to:

- a) providing pressure to his fingers
- b) an object coming towards his fingers.
- c) having his fingers held while an object approaches them

a) providing pressure to his fingers

- Play a game similar to "This little piggy went to market" but use his fingers rather than his toes
- Count his fingers providing pressure to each nail bed as you do so
- Pretend to "catch" his fingers using a puppet
- Allow him to do the same thing to your fingers and to his own fingers
- Place clothes pins on his fingers (you will need to work on clothes pin games in b) first

b) and c) an object coming towards his fingers and gradually with any of these activities begin to hold his finger

- As above, use a puppet to "catch" his fingers
- Play with clothes pins – put them on edges of boxes, cans, etc and then his clothing
- Help him to put them on similar things
- Help him to put clothes pins on your fingers
- Open a wooden clothes pin on which you have drawn eyes and a nose (an alligator's big mouth) and encourage him to move his finger towards the mouth
- When he is completely comfortable with this, move the clothes pin towards his fingers to "catch" them – make sure you include all fingers one at a time as he becomes comfortable
- Allow him to play the game with you first if he is timid
- Help him to place clothes pins on his fingers while you hold each finger gradually releasing pin to increase pressure as he can tolerate it
- Use different types of clothes pins (plastic, wooden) that have varying degrees of pressure
- Expose him to the nail clippers by allowing him to feel them, "play" with them
- Demonstrate how they cut your nails
- Help him to use the clippers to cut your nails
- Once he is comfortable with all of the above and especially the last two items, open the clippers and play the "alligator" game allowing him to move his finger towards the clippers
  - hold his finger and bring it towards the clipper allowing him to control the movement
  - Gradually increase the proximity to the clippers until he can keep his finger in the clipper without attempting to pull it away

**If at any time, he becomes fearful, stop and returns to playing one of the previous games. Have fun!**

---

Occupational Therapist · CommuniCare Therapy  
(613) 738-1884 ext. \_\_\_\_\_

*Resource from Jane Boni, OT Reg. (Ont.)*