



INFORMATION SHEET

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Health Care activities for families - Handwashing

All the published guidance reminds us hand washing is one of the easiest ways to protect yourself and the person you support from the Covid-19 infection. We know that this is not an easy or simple task for many children and adults with severe learning disabilities. Many families we are in touch with are very concerned about supporting their relatives to wash their hands effectively.

All our information sheets are available to download free of charge. To enable us to continue our work [please support us](#) or make a £5 donation by texting CBFDN05 to 70085.

Is this resource helpful? Please spend a few minutes giving us some feedback: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/cbfresources

In this document there are some practical suggestions to make handwashing a fun activity for your loved ones as well as part of your daily routine– they are suggestions that you can adapt according to the person you are supporting. Remember:

- some days it will be easier than others, it will take time to introduce a new activity successfully.
- try and introduce handwashing activities when your relative is relatively calm and happy.
- “chaining” is important. You can break tasks into small steps, as part of a chain. Find an example [here](#).
- although the aim is to wash hands regularly before meals, this may take time; don’t try and introduce new handwashing activities when your relative is tired, hungry or anxious.
- try to pick the activities that work best for your relative and repeat regularly so they learn what to expect.
- as the weather gets nicer, paddling pools and buckets of water outside can provide extra opportunities for handwashing games.
- use hand creams proactively. If skin is dry and sore, it will be very difficult to encourage someone to wash their hands. If possible, add using hand creams regularly to your routine after drying hands.

Use your relative’s preferred method of communication to let them know what you will be doing. We have included some suggestions below but there will be many other methods families use to communicate, including Makaton and PECs - use whatever works best for your family.

Add handwashing to a visual timetable or now and next chart if you use them. See example [charts here](#).

Pictures, symbols and objects

If pictures or symbols work well with your relative, use them in the way you would usually to indicate what you will be doing.



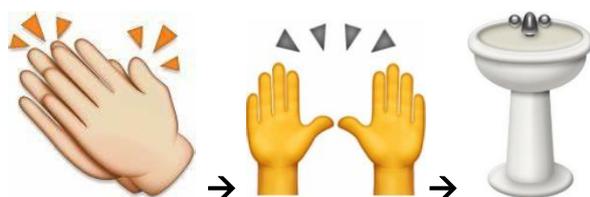
You may want to use the image on this page if helpful:

- Show it to your loved one
- Go together to the sink and follow the steps one by one
- [Print it](#) if you are able and stick it in front of the sink

Create a signal as a prompt for handwashing

For example:

Clap hands, shake hand and we go directly to the sink.



Objects of reference

For people who use Objects of Reference for communication you might want to use an appropriate object as a prompt such as a piece of towel or a plug to represent hand washing and help them understand the activity.



Once the activity has been well established, this prompt can be used before every meal and every time you return to the house.

Handwashing games

Bubbles

1. Get a washing up bowl or a bucket
2. Explain to your relative using their preferred communication method that you are going to play with water and bubbles
3. Support them to half fill a bucket or washing up bowl with warm (not too hot!) water and place it on the table / in the bath/ in a suitable place which won't be damaged by splashing.
4. Explain that you are going to make bubbles. Support your relative to add some washing up liquid or a small amount of bubble bath to the water. Offer them the choice (e.g. type of soap, colour or perfume). Try using products like Gelli Baff for variety ([find more here](#))
5. Show and explain that putting your hands in the water and moving them about makes bubbles
6. Encourage your relative to keep their hands in the water and make more bubbles. Join in, using the opportunity to apply extra soap and wash their hands as you make bubbles together



You find, I find

Set up the bubbly water as above. Explore other options in the bubbly water: e.g. Drop objects into the water (e.g. plastic fish or lego bricks). Ask the person to find the items. You could take it in turns (e.g. You find the fish? I find the fish)

Songs and Rhymes

Use the person's favourite song or a new one when washing hands.

The NHS have produced [this video](#) on how to wash hands. You can connect this song with handwashing, as encouragement, especially when the person you support is not willing to wash hands.

There is another handwashing rhyme [here](#) which can be printed and used as a poster and other examples [here](#).



Try using a song you know your relative enjoys and pairing the song with the handwashing each time to make it a fun experience.

Sensory soap experience

Some people enjoy using different types of soap, for example [foamy soaps](#) or soap or bubble bath with different perfumes or different colours. If you are able to get hold of some different types (we know this may be a challenge in the current situation) you can see what your relative prefers and offer them the choice.

Making use of special interests

If your relative has a special interest that can be linked to handwashing, try to use that to make the activity engaging for them. For example, if they love trains, can you encourage them to wash their plastic trains in soapy water?

The game *I touch, I wash*

Start using same wording for handwashing, so your relative will know what you mean by it.

Every time she/he touches something that may not be clean, we say: "I touch, I wash" and go together to the sink.



Introduce this gradually using a game. Have a bowl of water and lots of things to touch around the bowl and model touching the object and then putting hands in the bowl. You can try to make it funny using a joke. For example, you can touch a toy and then say "Oh no! Silly Mummy/daddy/me! Not clean! I touch I wash!". Then your loved one can touch an object and wash afterwards. You can give a choice of what to touch and then say again "Oh no! I touch, I wash".

This could also be done at bath time, with objects placed around the bath.

Drying hands

After handwashing, help the person dry their hands carefully. Have a small soft towel handy.

Try to make this part of the game you have been playing so the step is not missed, as hands may become sore. For example, dry the toys or objects used as well as hands, make up your own hand drying song to follow the handwashing song or show on a now and next chart that their favourite activity is





allowed after hands are dried.

Hand massage*

After handwashing, introduce hand massage with a hand cream. If appropriate, provide a choice of cream depending on the colour or smell. This can be particularly relaxing before bedtime!

*People who display pica behaviour should be closely supervised.



If you find any of the ideas in here work for your relative or have any other suggestions, please share them via support@thecbf.org.uk

We would also love to see any videos of successful handwashing that you would be happy to share with other families.

Many thanks to the families who helped to create this resource.

Reviewed 12/01/2021

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

We are a UK charity specifically focussed on the needs of children and adults with severe learning disabilities whose behaviour challenges, and their families. We make a difference to the lives of children and adults across the UK through:

- providing reliable information about challenging behaviour
- peer support groups for family carers and professionals
- supporting families by phone or email
- running workshops to reduce challenging behaviour
- speaking up for families and campaigning

To access our information and support, call 01634 838739, email info@thecbf.org.uk or visit our website: www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk