autism wellbeing

Smearing: Ideas for alternative sensory activities…

The person may be seeking sensory input - for example the intense smell or the sensation of the wet / warm stool in the hands for example.

If the individual is smearing for sensory reasons you can try and devise activities that may provide them with sensory stimuli that can offer a substitute for the sensation sought through smearing.

As you become more attuned to when the smearing may occur you can make sure that these alternative activities are carried out long before the person may feel the need to smear:

Visual: They may be visually enjoying mark making. If it is a visual experience for them you can try finger and body painting, you can get some paints for painting on the edge of the bath. You can draw in shaving foam on a flat surface. Brown paint may be best but try other colours too.

Tactile (touch): Clay, play do, papier mache or slime/gloop can be good tactile substitutes. If the person likes the temperature of the warm/cold faeces try changing the temperature of the clay or playdoh. Playing with tinned plum tomatoes or shower gel can offer moist tactile input. For some, playing with a mixture of sand and water may offer some sought after sensory experiences. Making bread dough can offer resistance in the hands as well as opportunities to manipulate the dough. These tactile experiences may also have an auditory element as they are squashed and squeezed.

Olfactory (smell): If the person appears to seek the smell of faeces then offering opportunities to have strong smell available to them can be effective. Smells such as marmite, vinegar, soya sauce, essential oils, spices, citrus. Inhaler tubes that you can fill yourself can be purchased e.g. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Healifty-Inhaler-Essential-Aromatherapy-Inhalers

Interoception (awareness of internal body signals): Some people may not be aware that they need to poo so it is a surprise when it happens. Other people may notice the sensation of needing to poo and find it enjoyable – particularly if they don't notice other internal signals. Help the person to notice and describe the sensations associated with defecation so that they are able to communicate and understand this bodily function.

Gustatory (taste): Not many foods have the taste of faeces – after all, it is a taste that is often associated with food going off. Some people may gain satisfaction from eating foods like peanut butter that are soft/sticky and coat the inside of their mouth.