autism
wellbeing

Top Tips for supporting someone who smears, and for looking after your own wellbeing…

- It can feel really difficult to stay calm – revulsion, shock, nausea, exasperation and anger are all commonly experienced emotions.
- If you can act in a calm way then it can spare people feeling shame or judgment, and it won't give the impression that smearing is an effective communication strategy.
- If you are helping someone clean themselves after they have smeared, be aware of how your interaction may be affecting their senses. Speak calmly, move gently, be aware of the person's sensitivity to touch.
- Accept that the individual is smearing to meet a need. It could be medical, sensory, behavioural or communicative.
- Understand this activity as something the individual feels they need to do for a sensory, regulation or communication purpose, rather than as a negative behaviour personally directed at the caregiver.
- It is important not to punish or make the individual clean the faeces up themselves, or be part of the cleaning process. Feeling dysregulated, humiliated, or shamed is not likely to reduce the activity if the reason for the activity is to seek comfort, or for regulation.
- Praise the positives, for example 'well done for pooing in the toilet'. Don't focus on the negatives.
- The person may have difficulties with constipation that can lead to discomfort, blockages or loose stool (poo) that seeps around the constipated stool.
- The person may have a fear of toilets. Public toilets in particular can be extra noisy and smelly and people may hold on and not use them. Or they may find the touch of toilet paper distressing – moist wipes may be preferred.
- Some individuals may feel concerned about where the faeces may go or dislike the idea of being parted from the matter coming out of their bodies. Simple explanations may help.
- Smearing can feel distressing to everyone involved, make sure you take time to regulate your own emotions and senses and take care of yourself first, before trying to support the person who is smearing.