Developing hygiene practices for children with developmental delays
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INTRODUCTION:
Hygiene skills are identified as priorities for adolescent students with sensory, social or developmental challenges; however, few appropriate clinical resources are available. Hygiene Heroes was developed to address this gap. Social Stories, chaining and visuals are often used by Occupational Therapists to support skill development.

OBJECTIVE:
A literature review was conducted to support best practice in the implementation of social stories, chaining and visual schedules within the Hygiene Heroes program.

APPROACH:
Research quality limitations include:
• Small sample sizes or individual case studies
• Use of many strategies in conjunction with the strategy being studied
• Social Story research focused on children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and the format cited by Carol Gray
• Use of children focused on those with a relative strength in verbal skills
• Limited use of meaningful, intrinsically rewarding functional tasks

PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS:
Social Stories
• Need to be individualized using appropriate language and context for the child and situation
• Maintaining one sentence per page with one picture per sentence is recommended
• Daily reading of the story (either independently or with the caregiver) is needed until the child has an understanding of what is expected and can behave accordingly
• Appropriate fading techniques are needed

Chaining
• Can be used to shape behaviours, teach motor tasks or life skills and are useful because children can see the entire task modeled from start to finish every time and it allows children to experience successful task completion regardless of their understanding of the task
• Focus is on one new aspect of the task at a time
• The chaining approach needs to be tailored to the individual child’s abilities and the complexity and error tolerances of the task being taught: (e.g. backwards chaining of long complex tasks may lead to more errors; consider where errors are more tolerable at the beginning or end of the task and choose chaining as appropriate; for those with ASD it is unclear if prompting can be completely faded for complex tasks and whole task training is often more successful)
• Use of reinforcers must be considered prior to beginning and incorporated appropriately

Visuals
• Pictures are the most universally understood symbols and should be used to support learning and understanding. They can communicate expectations and the sequences of events or actions
• Consistent visuals can be incorporated in social stories and visual schedules in conjunction with chaining.
• Visuals have been shown to effectively compensate for short term memory and deficits, compensate for communication deficits, capitalize on visual spatial strengths and early literacy abilities
• When used in conjunction with social stories and chaining, they can help to support fading of caregiver dependent prompts (verbal and physical) and promote independence.

CONCLUSIONS:
The Hygiene Heroes program provides a framework for supporting the development of functional hygiene practices in children with sensory, social and developmental challenges. Based on the evidence, Social Stories, chaining and visuals are most effective for this population when modified to reflect individualized: context and environments, needs and abilities, specific goals, and fading of strategies. Therefore individualization and generalization of skill use across environments is strongly recommended.

References