

Smearing advice sheet

What is smearing?

Faecal or 'Poo' Smearing is a term used for a behaviour where a person takes their faeces and wipes it on themselves, and/or surrounding environment and objects.


Caregivers can understandably find smearing behaviour offensive and difficult to deal with.


But why does smearing occur?


All behaviour serves a function, smearing is no different and the child may be communicating a need that is:

- Medical; for example with constipation child may be trying to remove faeces due to discomfort.
- Sensory; the 'seeking' of the sensory tactile input- eg the smell or texture
- Behavioural; to 'communicate' agitation, distress

More often though, smearing occurs when a person notices the sensation of being soiled, investigates what has happened by placing hand in nappy, notices hands are dirty then wipes them on surroundings in order to clean their hands.

<p><u>Medical</u></p> 	<p>Could the person be...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling unwell • In pain or discomfort • Constipated • Stressed, anxious or distressed 	<p>What may help...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular medical check-ups • Awareness of bowel habits • Consideration of any pain • Calming activity, structure and routine can help build feelings of safety and security.
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<p><u>Behaviour</u></p> 	<p>Could the person be...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bored • Seeking response or reassurance from caregiver • Reacting to an external trigger e.g. demand, told no, etc 	<p>What may help...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring access to suitable and meaningful activity • Showing little reaction in response to smearing • Praise/positive reaction for not smearing
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<p><u>Sensory</u></p> 	<p>Could the person be...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Seeking' out the tactile experience of faeces • Reluctant to use toilet paper, if they find it too harsh? 	<p>What may help...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to 'sensory' play experiences of similar textures, e.g paper mache, slime, gloop, play dough (particularly when smearing usually occurs) • Try wet wipes or moisten paper first if toilet paper disliked
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Other things to consider...

- Having a **'clean-up kit'** helps caregivers to feel prepared and able to deal with clean-up duty if need arises
- Considering **what is happening**, before, during and after smearing to identify possible function of the behaviour
- Consider **where** it occurs if not just home, and how it is dealt with in these settings.
- **Staying alert!** - change nappy quickly. Be mindful of any signs that nappy is soiled and try to change immediately to reduce access and therefore risk of smearing.