



Smearing

When a child smears faeces this behaviour does not just have an impact on the child but on the whole family.



What are the common difficulties?

- Many families find smearing hard to deal with because of the physical consequences such as washing, disinfecting
- It can affect the bonding between a parent and their child.
- If a child smears away from home this can lead to a parent avoiding social situations and becoming isolated

What are the issues?

- A child may smear for many reasons, dependent on their age and whether or not they have a disability such as autism.
- An autistic child who has an entrenched sensitivity to texture and/or smell will find faecal smearing a rewarding experience.
- Common in children who have been abused, so it is a challenge often faced by parents who are fostering children.
- Some young children - under 2, show a natural interest in their own faeces. Such children might start to use the faeces as an art tool.
- Smearing can indicate early traumatic experiences that a child cannot put into words.
- Smearing can become a **vicious cycle**. When a child smears the child gets an immediate response, lots of attention is diverted off others and onto them and possibly some verbal interaction. For all children any attention is better than none. This in itself rewards the child and encourages the smearing.

How can we help?

- For the child who has not experienced abuse/neglect in their early childhood we need to teach the child that they get lots of positive attention when they are behaving appropriately and no attention when they smear. So when you clean up the child, this is carried out with minimal interaction
- Don't **not** comment on the smearing, Try and keep your face neutral as you clean the child and the walls. No eye contact, no talking.
- Don't involve the child in the clearing up process as they will then see your reaction
- Don't inadvertently offer a reward, such as putting the TV on, while you clear up
- Think about clothing can we use it to inhibit access? For example all in one suits, putting vests on back to front so the child can not access the poppers and putting pants over the nappy
- Social story books such as www.promocon.co.uk/PictureBook.pdf can help.
- Messy play is helpful for all children who smear. Leave play dough finger paints and an easel in the room where they usually smear.
- Keeping a diary of what the child was doing before and after the smearing can highlight situations that lead to smearing.
- If the child has been abused, need to try to work with them to find different ways they can communicate their distress.