

HYGIENE

What Is This Developmental Skill?

Hygiene includes the routines children use to care for their bodies, such as bathing, brushing their teeth, washing their hands, caring for their hair, using deodorant, and changing into clean clothing. These skills support health, comfort, self-respect, and social participation.

How Does This Normally Develop?

Young children depend on adults to complete most hygiene tasks. Over time, caregivers model each routine, explain why it matters, help the child practice, and gradually reduce assistance. Children eventually learn to notice when care is needed and complete the steps more independently. Consistent routines help hygiene become predictable and automatic.

How Can Neglect Interfere With Its Development?

Children may not have had reliable access to bathing supplies, clean clothing, dental care, or adult supervision. They may never have been taught the steps involved in hygiene routines. Some may associate bathing or body care with discomfort, criticism, or intrusive adult behavior.

Sensory sensitivities may also make water, toothpaste, hair brushing, or certain smells difficult to tolerate.

What Might This Look Like?

The child may:

- Resist bathing, toothbrushing, or hair care.
- Forget hygiene routines without repeated reminders.
- Wear dirty clothing even when clean clothing is available.
- Use excessive amounts of soap or other products.
- Rush through routines without completing them.
- Become embarrassed or defensive when hygiene is discussed.
- Seem unaware of body odor, dirty hands, or unclean clothing.

Parenting Implications

Caregivers may need to teach hygiene routines directly rather than assume the child already knows them. Instructions should be specific, respectful, and developmentally appropriate. Visual checklists, predictable schedules, preferred products, and sensory accommodations can make routines easier. Caregivers should protect the child's privacy and avoid discussing hygiene difficulties in front of others.

From Understanding to Attunement

Poor hygiene may reflect missing instruction, sensory discomfort, developmental delays, or shame rather than carelessness. An attuned response might be: "No one may have shown you all the steps yet. We can practice them together until they feel easier."