SmallTalk PEDIATRIC THERAPY

Preparing to use Public Restrooms

Scan Me for a Social Story!

Public restrooms can be challenging due to unexpected sounds, strong smells, bright lighting, and unfamiliar routines. These strategies may help your child feel more comfortable and confident.

Before the Restroom Visit

- Talk about the sounds your child may hear (hand dryers, toilets flushing) Minute 4:20
- Use First-Then language (i.e., "First bathroom, then play.") Minute 5:05
- Visual schedule or social story (Scan QR code for ours!) Minute 5:55
- Offer choices when possible (e.g., which stall to use, headphones or no headphones) Minute 7:35
- Deep breathing Minute 4:45
- Hand/shoulder squeezes

During the Restroom Visit

- Use noise-cancelling headphones, ear defenders, or allow them to cover their ears Minute 4:40
- Cover automatic flush sensors with a sticky note or tissue if appropriate
- Flush after your child has exited the stall if preferred
- Stand farther away from hand dryers or use paper towels when available
- Offer praise for each step completed

After the Restroom Visit

- Provide reassurance and positive feedback
- Use a preferred calming activity if needed
- Continue with the planned routine or preferred activity
- Celebrate your child's effort and success

Understanding Sensory Thresholds

Everyone processes sensory information differently.

Low Threshold (Small Cup): Notices sensory input quickly and may become overwhelmed.

Regulated (Medium Cup): Notices and handles input in a balanced and regulated way.

High Threshold (Large Cup): Needs more sensory input before noticing or responding.

Examples:

- Overresponsive children may cover their ears, avoid entering the bathroom, be startled by toilet flushing or hand dryers, avoid touching handles, faucets, or flushers, or disliking the sensation of the toilet seat, seat cover, or wiping.
- Underresponsive children may not notice they need to use the restroom until it is urgent, not register strong smells, or may not be able to determine when hands are fully dry.

Neither response is good or bad—just different ways the nervous system processes sensory information.