

Dudley Children's Occupational Therapy Service
The Sunflower Centre
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Smearing

The information below has been compiled from various sources listed at the bottom of this document.

- The term smearing is used to describe children spreading poo on walls, furniture, themselves, or anywhere apart from the toilet/potty or pants/nappy.
- The first time a child smears is likely to be their way of communicating with parent/carer, for example:
 - Constipation – the child may ease uncomfortable stool stuck in the anus/rectum.
 - The child may be aware of poo in their nappy, and reach inside to relieve discomfort or out of curiosity.
- If the child is smearing then first of all go to your GP, health visitor or school nurse, to ensure there are no physical reason why this is happening such as the child being in pain.
- They may not understand wiping so may need help developing this skill (see toileting pack).
- Some children enjoy the feeling of smearing, try providing other suitable activities like finger painting, playdough or playing with cornflour and water mix.
- Sometimes the parent clearing up after smearing may be rewarding for the child, particularly if they like water play and attention (even negative attention can be rewarding).
- Instead use minimal interaction and alternative clean-up methods such as tepid shower or flannel / wet wipes.
- As with all behaviours which challenge, there is no magic wand available to change the child's behaviour; success will be the result of perseverance, consistency and positive interaction with carers.

References and useful resources

<https://www.bbuk.org.uk/children-young-people/>

<https://eric.org.uk/smearing/>