

Car Washing: An Activity for Learning, Development and Imagination

The focus of this occupational therapy series is on everyday home occupations that support children's learning, development and wellbeing. By encouraging your child to participate with you in these activities, opportunities for learning can occur as there is great learning potential to be found in everyday occupations.

Washing the car is the perfect job for children of all ages and abilities to get involved in! Not only is it an amazing sensory learning experience but it also allows children to enjoy the pleasure of 'doing' with others. Depending on your child's age and level of ability you can make this activity as simple or as challenging as you feel appropriate. Washing the car provides opportunities for developing and practicing a number of skill areas:

1. **Whole body movement skills** including balancing and using the two sides of the body together (bilateral-coordination) can be developed when washing the car. It also involves lots of bending, reaching and stretching.
2. Scrubbing the car is a great resistive activity, providing lots of **heavy work** to the muscles. It involves large body movements that helps to develop **body awareness and spatial awareness** (where I am in space and where I am in relation to other objects). Help children to develop their understanding of positional and directional words by describing their movements; "That's it, move the sponge from top to bottom".






3. **Fine motor skills** in particular hand strength and dexterity can be developed as hands wring out the cloth, grip on to the sponge or perhaps twist the nozzle of the hose.
4. **Sensory exploration:** Water plus suds = lots of sensory fun. Use language to bring their attention to the sensory experience (wet, warm, smooth, splashing sounds etc.). Tailor the activity to your child's sensory needs and preferences.

5. Older children can get more involved in the process, learning the details about good car washing. This will challenge their **planning and sequencing skills** as they will need to **a)** use the correct tools for the different parts of the car and **b)** complete the task in a particular series of steps. Children can be supported through the use of visual schedules, checklists, prompting or other ways familiar to them.



Helpful Tips

-  Turn on some upbeat **music** and everyone can wash along to the beat.
-  **Old socks** can be useful wash cloths – just pop them on like mittens.
-  Washing the car creates lots of opportunity for **play and imagination**. Children can splash in the puddles, watch things float in the streams, make patterns with the soapy water or bring toys outside to play in the puddles.

Pretend Car Wash



- No car? No problem! Gather your children's bikes, scooters and outdoor toys and set up a '**Bikes & Trikes**' car wash. Simply provide a bucket of soapy warm water, various sponges and brushes, and a towel for drying.
- Alternatively you can set up a **pretend car wash indoors** and wash small toys and cars. Set up two stations, one for washing, and the other for drying.
- Build a drive through 'Car Wash'. This can provide lots of fun for pretend play! Use some building blocks, Lego or even dig into your recycling bin. Add a spray bottle of water and a cloth for the washing process.

Additional resources

<https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/water/>

<https://www.playscotland.org/resources/chuckies-n-puddles-4/>