

Recently a parent asked me, "Why does my child freak out when I make her wear socks?" She's not the first person to ask me that and I'll wager she won't be the last. Many children seem to have this tactile sensitivity and the more I talk to others, the more I realize that many adults might too. "These socks hurt my feet... These pants are *so* uncomfortable ... This tag burns my neck." Are only a few of the clothing complaints you might hear. Ruling out medical reasons is always prudent, but with or without a diagnosis you'll still need to deal with the challenge of getting along with someone who is ULTRA picky about what he/she wears.

So what can you do? I interviewed Kristin, a mother of a child with definite sensitivities, to provide us with some real life experience. "First, you need to relate to what they are feeling. Imagine taking a piece of sandpaper and rubbing it around and around on your bare arm, in the same spot, for about an hour. Sounds painful, doesn't it? Well that's how clothing can feel for these kids." Kristin admits it took a while for her to realize this was real for her daughter. "It wasn't stubbornness, or some well thought out plot to drive me insane. The cuffs on her jacket really were irritating her."

Kristin's *Sanity* tips

- Work with your child to figure out what works for him. Accept his sensitivity and focus on finding solutions rather than forcing him to change.
- Choose your battles - if there is no *really* good reason why your child must wear closed in shoes, don't push it. Allow her to wear clogs or flip flops and save the 'forcing' for the winter boots during subzero temperatures (remember boots will need to be a couple sizes too big).

"My child never wears socks - not skating, in boots - never."

- Allow choices whenever possible, but also help your child understand that her special situation may not be used as a tool to get out of things. i.e. refuse to wear ski-pants can't be used as a reason to stay in when everyone else must go out (and no complaining you're cold!)
- Treat shopping like a scavenger hunt. Let your child shop with you, but have a time limit that you stick to. Be prepared to purchase at least 1 size bigger than she takes (often 2 - 3 times). Try out different fabrics (natural fibers seem better) and look for small seams. Avoid anything that causes a bump in the clothing (be prepared to cut the cuffs out of that brand new snow suit!). Don't push your child to buy something because you like it and avoid rushed purchases.
- Don't put clothing in the dryer - any amount of shrinkage or tightening up can undo all your careful shopping practices.
- Be prepared to advocate for your child. Write notes, or have meetings with school/daycare explaining the situation. Accept responsibility for any rule breaking you might be proposing (i.e. no runners in gym), and be understanding of their need to limit your child's participation where their rules cannot be broken. Let your child know of the consequence - then let him choose.
- Prepare yourself to ignore the stares, comments, snickers and that overwhelming desire to explain to others why your child dresses the way she does - day after day.

"My motto now is, *if it's not life threatening - don't sweat it*. My child is healthy, goes to school daily and for the most part seems happy with life. In the big scheme of things that is what's really important.... So what if she looks like she's homeless?"

Trying to raise a child with tactile sensitivities doesn't sound easy. But perhaps with a little creative thinking and understanding, we can help take the sting out of wearing socks.

Examples of common offenders:

Gathered elastic waistbands	Closed shoes (runners, boots, dress shoes)
Seams in socks (sometimes even when inside out)	Denim material
Tags on clothing	Lace trim
Snug cuffs - jackets and/or pants	Decals/embroidery
Bodysuits & leotards	Buttons/zippers
One piece bathing suits (for girls)	Any snug piece of clothing
Underwear	Hair brush on the scalp