

PDA Hygiene Routine Reset (Teens)

Simple shifts to reduce conflict and support hygiene with less pressure

Why hygiene triggers PDA

- Sensory overload (water, smells, textures)
- Demand feels like loss of control
- Pressure quickly escalates resistance

Parent nervous system first

- Neutral tone, fewer words
- No power struggles or ultimatums
- Your calm helps their nervous system settle

Support autonomy

- Offer choices (full, partial, or minimal hygiene)
- Let them choose order and timing
- Keep choices simple

What to say instead

Instead of: "You need to take a shower."

Try: "Do you want full shower or quick version today?"

Instead of: "You smell, go fix it."

Try: "Let's find the easiest way to feel more comfortable."

Instead of: "Just brush your teeth."

Try: "Want to try a short version or rinse today?"

Instead of: "Why won't you do this?"

Try: "Is it the feeling or the demand that's harder?"

Lower the sensory load

- Adjust temperature (warm/cool)
- Dim lights or reduce noise
- Try different products (toothpaste, shampoo)

Minimum counts

- Deodorant + clean shirt counts
- Mouthwash counts
- Partial hygiene still helps

If it gets stuck

- Start with one small step
- Pause if it escalates
- Try again later without pressure

Hygiene resistance is often a nervous system response, not refusal. Reduce demand, support autonomy, and keep connection. - Tara Triebel