Re: Head banging

Head banging is common. Up to 20 percent of babies and toddlers bang their head on purpose, with boys three times more likely to do so than girls. Head banging often starts in the second half of the first year of life and peaks between 18 and 24 months of age. A child's head banging may last for several months, or even years, though most children outgrow it by 3 years of age.

Possibly reasons for head banging include:

* Self-comfort. As strange as it may sound, most children who bang their heads do it to relax. Children bang their head rhythmically when falling asleep, when waking up in the middle of the night, or even while sleeping.
* Pain relief. A child is more likely to bang their head when they have an ear infection or are suffering from some other physical discomfort. Head banging may help your child feel better, perhaps by distracting them from the pain they are feeling elsewhere.
* Frustration. Children may bang their head during temper tantrums as a way of venting strong emotions, as they haven’t learned to express feelings adequately through words.
* A need for attention. Ongoing head banging may be a way for your child to get your attention.
* A developmental problem. Head banging can be associated with autism and other developmental disorders, but usually there are lots of other concerning behaviours. Rarely does head banging alone signal a serious problem.

Please re-refer if there are any other concerns regarding the child’s behaviour or development.

Information for parents:

What can I do about it?

Make sure they get plenty of positive attention from you when not banging their head. If they still bang their head to get your attention, try not to make a big deal about it, or you may reinforce the behaviour.

If they are still in a cot, check all the screws and bolts once a month or more to make sure the rocking isn't loosening them. If your child sleeps in a regular bed, think about moving it away from the wall.

They may get a bruise or two, but don't worry — head banging is usually a "self-regulating" behaviour. This means they are unlikely to hit her head hard enough to seriously injure themselves.

Help find alternative forms of rhythmic expression, such as dancing, marching, clapping to music, or beating on toy bongo drums. You might also try putting a metronome in the room to give your child the comfort of a steady rhythm.

If your child bangs their head as a way of relaxing from a busy day, a relaxing night time routine can help. Try a warm bath, a calm rock on your lap, a backrub and a quiet story or song before lights out. Soft music in the bedroom can be soothing, too.

Ngā mihi

Yours sincerely

*(Electronically checked and approved)*

**Paediatric Team**

Paediatrician