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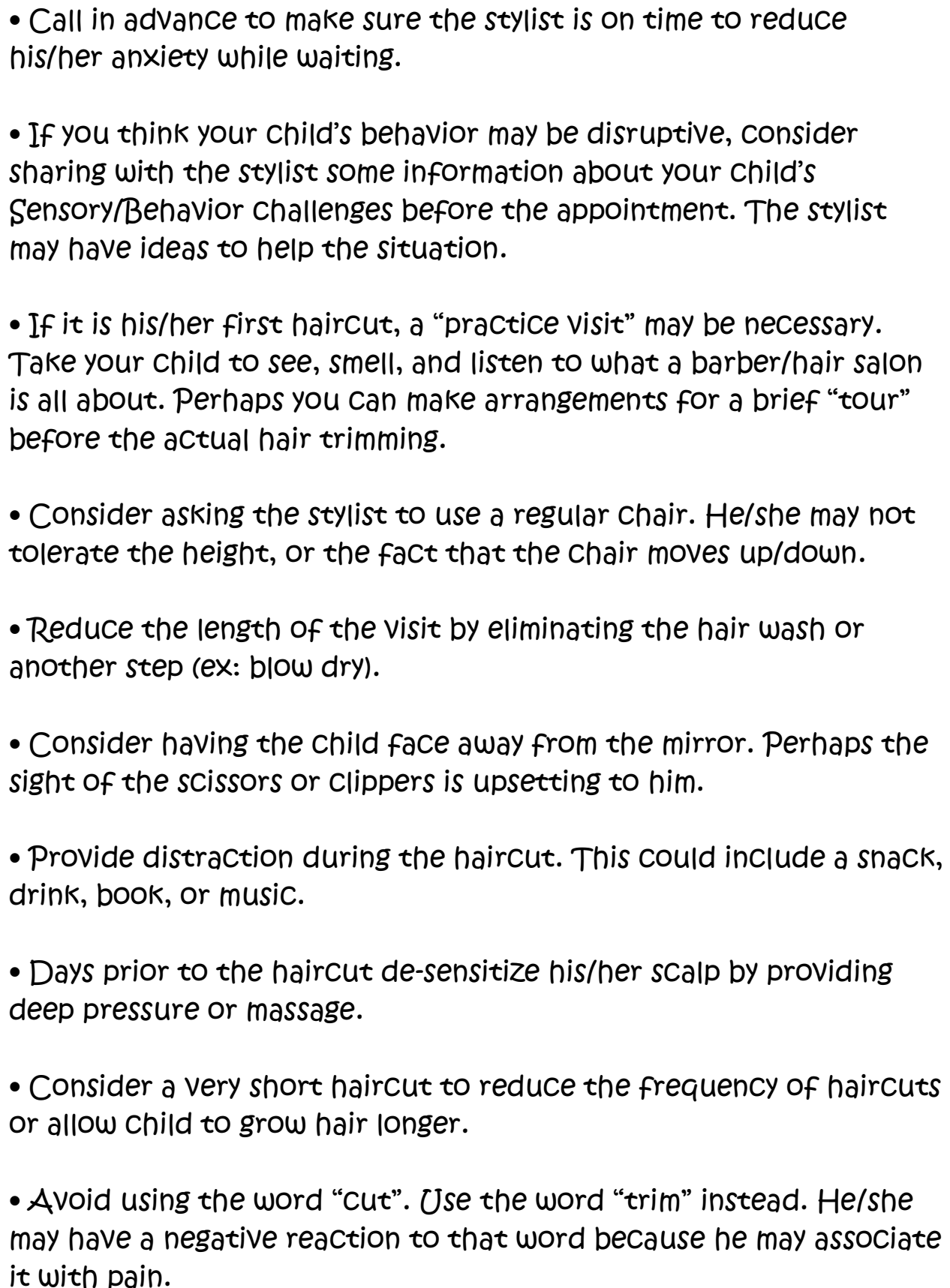
## *Sensory Challenges Around the Holidays*

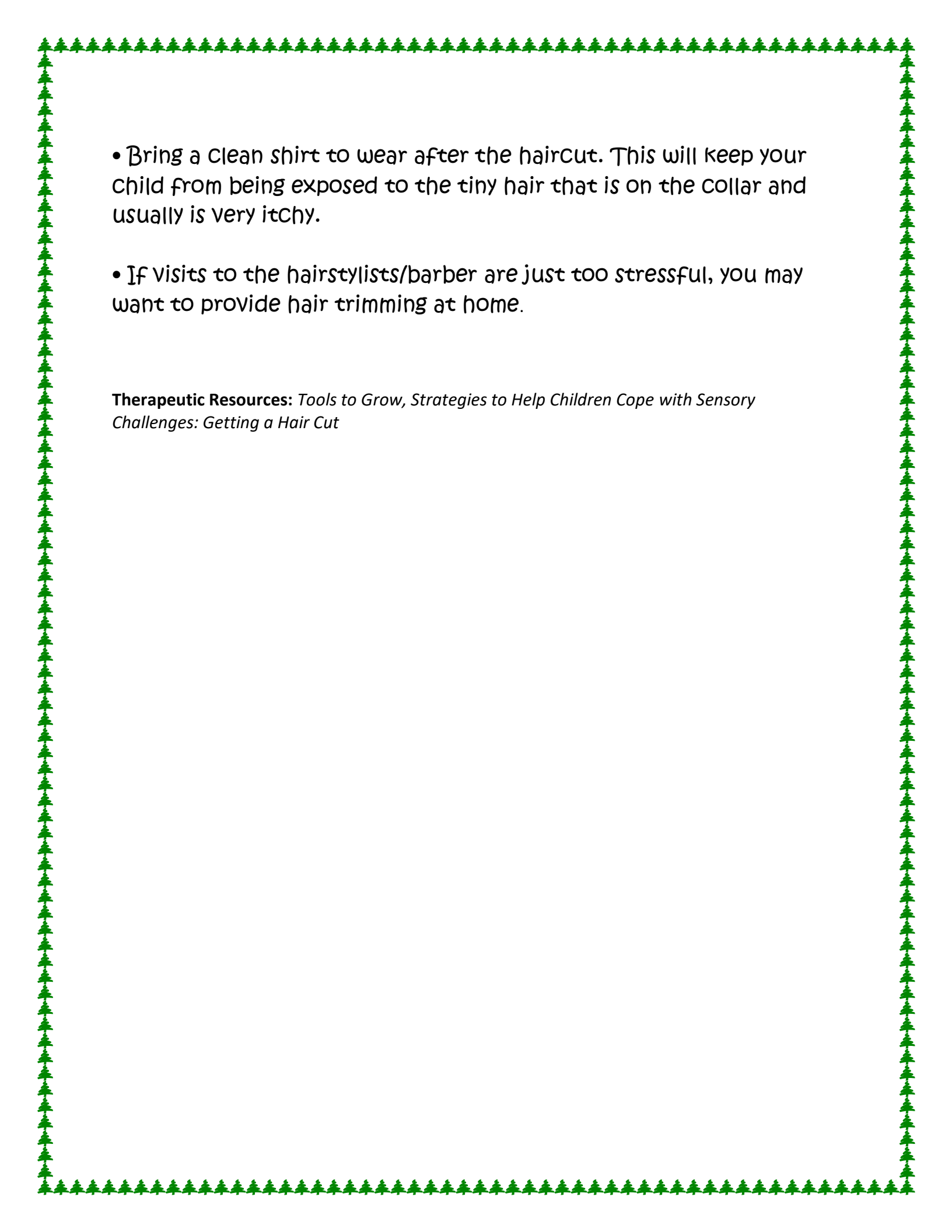
As the holidays approach, we want our little ones looking their best for family photos!!! This often requires a visit to the local barber or hair-dresser. However, what if your child becomes upset or agitated in the presence of loud noises like a hair buzzer or dryer? Does he/she become irritated by the feeling of hair clippings touching their neck? What if they can only tolerate sitting in the stylist's chair for a few minutes?

For children who have sensory challenges, getting a haircut can be very stressful. Below is a list of useful tips and strategies to help your child cope with their sensory challenges in order to facilitate a positive and stress free experience.



- Schedule the appointment when it is unlikely that he/she will be tired or hungry.
- Ask for a time that is usually "slow" and less hectic.

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- Call in advance to make sure the stylist is on time to reduce his/her anxiety while waiting.
  - If you think your child's behavior may be disruptive, consider sharing with the stylist some information about your child's Sensory/Behavior Challenges before the appointment. The stylist may have ideas to help the situation.
  - If it is his/her first haircut, a "practice visit" may be necessary. Take your child to see, smell, and listen to what a barber/hair salon is all about. Perhaps you can make arrangements for a brief "tour" before the actual hair trimming.
  - Consider asking the stylist to use a regular chair. He/she may not tolerate the height, or the fact that the chair moves up/down.
  - Reduce the length of the visit by eliminating the hair wash or another step (ex: blow dry).
  - Consider having the child face away from the mirror. Perhaps the sight of the scissors or clippers is upsetting to him.
  - Provide distraction during the haircut. This could include a snack, drink, book, or music.
  - Days prior to the haircut de-sensitize his/her scalp by providing deep pressure or massage.
  - Consider a very short haircut to reduce the frequency of haircuts or allow child to grow hair longer.
  - Avoid using the word "cut". Use the word "trim" instead. He/she may have a negative reaction to that word because he may associate it with pain.



- Bring a clean shirt to wear after the haircut. This will keep your child from being exposed to the tiny hair that is on the collar and usually is very itchy.

- If visits to the hairstylists/barber are just too stressful, you may want to provide hair trimming at home.

**Therapeutic Resources:** *Tools to Grow, Strategies to Help Children Cope with Sensory Challenges: Getting a Hair Cut*