

Dressing

Dressing is one of the earliest self care skills children start to master. Although taken for granted, aspects of dressing can be challenging; eg tying laces, doing buttons, getting clothes the right way around, etc. It also utilises many different skills, for example, dexterity, balance, movement planning and spatial organisation. It provides children with one of their first experiences of independence.

When teaching dressing skills, consider the following:

- follow the usual developmental sequence when teaching dressing
- undressing is easier than dressing
- tell the child what you expect them to do
- establish a routine that is kept the same every day
- use short, easily understandable instructions for every step
- break down the activity into small steps and only when one step is learnt, add another one
- lay the clothes out in the order in which they are put on, to help the child organise themselves
- loose fitting clothes with large openings are easier to get on/off than tight fitting ones
- backward chaining can be a useful method of teaching dressing
- give enough time when practicing dressing tasks. Make sure practice takes place when not under a time constraint; eg changing to night time clothes.
- unfasten buttons, shoe laces and fasteners on clothing before giving to the child to facilitate success.



Developing pre-dressing skills

- for increasing body awareness, start naming parts of the body on the child and consider songs, games, art activities and books that also name parts of the body
- consider naming garments and the relationship of the garment to the appropriate body part, using a running commentary as you are helping the child to dress, eg “Here is your jumper; what goes in the sleeves? Here is the hole for your head, show me where your head is?” etc.
- if the child has difficulty balancing, sitting is easier, either on the floor or a chair or with something to lean on such as a wall. A grab rail to hold on to can also assist with balance problems.

Sequencing skills

- ask the child to say what order they will put the clothes on before they start
- use picture checklists/visual charts/pictures
- make the sequence predictable, dress/undress in the same order every time
- start with expecting the child to remember the first item, then when consistent add next item when consistently remembering two items add third and so forth.

Getting clothing right way around

- begin with short sleeved loose garments, rather than tighter or long sleeved garments
- lay the jumper, vest etc out with the bottom edge nearest to the child and neck furthest away either on a table or the floor with the front facing down.

- put arms in first, then put the garment over the head, so the garment does not get twisted round or the sleeves lost
- sew or highlight tags on the back of garments, drawing attention to their position when orientating garment to put on
- consider sewing red bias binding tag round the inner right sleeve to associate the right arm in the right sleeve

Putting on socks

- sit well balanced either on a chair or on the floor
- hold the child's foot in place by supporting the leg so the child can focus on learning to get the sock on the foot without having to also manage to balance and reach forward
- start with a short, loose, large sock
- use tube socks for children who cannot get their heel in place or socks with coloured heels to provide a visual cue
- try hand over hand technique, with your hand over the child's, put their thumbs inside the sock, ready for the child to place their foot inside, and then help the child pull up the sock
- gradually remove assistance



Managing zips and buttons

- use Velcro elastic to adapt clothing
- use buttons:
 - use big buttons and loose button-holes to start
 - teach the child to unbutton first
 - put buttons on thin elastic instead of thread
 - try a button hook
- use zips:
 - enlarge zip grip with a piece of cord, choose chunky zips when learning to put bottom ends together, ensure child understands to keep one hand still to hold while the other moves to slot together the two pieces
 - try elastic banded trousers or skirts instead of those with buttons or zips
 - always start with front zippers, instead of side zips on skirts etc.

