



Explaining Dressing skills

Success is important; therefore begin with breaking the dressing activity into small, straightforward steps. Tackle one step at a time and give help where needed with the other steps of the task, e.g. help the child to pull the t-shirt over their head and then allow them to put their arms through the sleeves.

Dressing can be a complex activity. Children need to be able to master a number of skills.

These include:

- *Motor skills* where a child needs to be able to move his or her limbs and body in a full range of movements requiring muscle strength and flexibility at their joints.
- *Co-ordination* where a child needs to be able to create co-ordinated movements, using one arm and both arms. A child also needs the control of hand movement that require fine motor skills, such as fastening buttons.
- *Balance* – being able to maintain their balance whilst changing posture/position both with eyes open and shut.
- *Fine Motor Skills* – being able to reach, grasp and release objects in order to complete tasks such as buttoning or holding the item of clothing.
- *Perception* – having an understanding of various sizes and shapes of buttons and also knowing the size of arm holes.
- *Stereognosis* – being able to feel their way without relying on sight such as finding arm holes with a jumper over his or her head or fastening buttons behind at the back.
- *Body Schema* – being able to tell right from left and the difference between arms and legs.

General Principles

- Ensure that your child is sitting in a stable position, e.g. on the floor (where it is easier for children to reach their feet) or sitting on a chair or firm bed with his or her feet supported. If sitting balance is poor, try sitting against a wall. Some children may sit better in a corner where both walls give added support. Alternatively stand against a wall.
- Sit next to, in front of, or directly behind your child during activity and guide him or her through the task.
- Undressing is usually easier than dressing. Dress in front of the mirror to provide visual cues and use to check all is correct before going out.
- Start with undressing. Undressing before bed and helping to put on pyjamas is a good time to start as you have more time at night than in the morning.
- Follow a consistent sequence and technique when dressing:
 - Clothes can be placed in a pile in the order in which they need to be put on.
 - Follow the same technique for each garment, e.g. t-shirt is put over the head first and then the arms are put through the sleeves.
 - The order and technique can be written down so that it can be followed by other carers and school staff. You could use pictures as a visual prompt to help your child remember the clothing order/technique.
- Describe actions and parts of the body as you are helping your child to dress, eg 'put right foot in,' 'now stand up whilst I pull your trousers up your legs.'
- Instead of automatically correcting a mistake, get your child to look (maybe in a mirror) and feel if all is correct. Then encourage them to identify and sort out what needs to be done, e.g. T-shirt needs pulling down; shoes 'feel wrong' because they are on the opposite feet.
- Try to avoid fastenings, tight clothes and lots of layers. Instead use loose fitting clothing, e.g. tracksuits, sweatshirts. Use clothes with wide neck and arm holes to make it easier to locate these. Initially it may be easier to practise with clothing a size too big.
- Try not to watch all the time; your child may do more when left alone.



Development of dressing skills

Dressing should not be seen as a chore. Try to keep it fun by playing dressing up games and dressing toys. When dressing dolls, try using a doll which your child can relate to as being of a similar age. This will give your child a clearer idea of how to organise dressing.

DEVELOPMENT OF DRESSING SKILLS (Mary Sheridan – Children’s developmental progress)

12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps with dressing by holding out arm for sleeve and foot for shoe. Cooperative in dressing. Likes to pull shoes off.
18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes off shoes, socks, hat but rarely able to put back on.
2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Puts on hat and shoes. Removes unfastened coat. Helps push down garments Finds arm holes in t-shirt
2 1/2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tries to put on socks Undresses loose pull down garments
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to put on shoes without fastening (may be wrong foot) Can pull zips up and down, but unable to insert or separate shank.
4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T-Shirt on/off independently but may be back to front. Pull up garments on independently
5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dresses and undresses independently but may still need help with small buttons, zips and laces. Clothing may still be put on back-to front on occasion.

These ages are a guide only, but can help determine a young child’s readiness for dressing independently.

Pre-Dressing Skills Activities

- Musical dressing up (a variation of musical chairs): the children put items of clothing on from a pile until the music stops, at the end of the game the child with the most clothes on is the winner.
- Using a variety of large shirts or smocks, get the children to get ready for wet play, painting or cooking.
- Button boards, play cubes, cloth button or popper books to give the child practice types of fastenings.
- Dressing dolls give good practice opportunities
- Matching sock game. Place a variety of socks in a pile, and your child has to find pairs and put them on.
- Package wrapping. Making parcels and tying them up with different sorts of ties.
- Play ‘Simon Says’ and get your child to identify various body parts. Do the ‘hokey cokey’ as a way to learn left from right.
- Completing threading activities. Getting them to copy a pattern of various sized beads on thread (wool is better for larger beads) to improve pattern recognition. Adapt the task by getting the child to pull desired bead from bag.
- Complete lacing activities using lacing boards to develop fine motor skills such as grip, release and eye-hand co-ordination. A shoe shaped piece of card or shoe box with holes in can be used to practise lacing and tying shoes.
- Posting coins. Let your child use pincer (finger and thumb) grip to post coins into a money box. This will help develop pre-button skills.
- Completing jigsaws and form boards will assist with visual skills.
- Foot massage. Give the child a foot massage to increase awareness of feet. This can also be achieved by walking on various surfaces barefooted, grass, concrete, etc. Do these as a preparation for putting on shoes and socks, tying shoelaces.
- Clothes pictures. Make a picture representation of the clothes your child is wearing and get him or her to talk through what order to undress/dress in. These pictures can then be used as a reference point for future dressing sessions.

Ways to learn dressing skills

Backward Chaining

Here the adult begins the task, with the child only doing the last step. Gradually the adult does less as the child is able to do more of the task themselves. This way the child always gets the reward of finishing the task, e.g. the adult puts the T-shirt over the child's head and helps them to get their arms through the holes. The child then pulls down the t-shirt at the front.

An Example Of Backward Chaining

Taking off a shirt:

Step 1; Let the child remove the last half of their arm from the sleeve

Step 2; Let the child remove their whole arm from the sleeve

Step 3; Let the child remove shirt with one arm in and one arm half in

Step 4; Let the child remove shirt when pulled off shoulders

Step 5; Let the child remove the shirt

T-shirt:

Step 1; Let the child remove the T-shirt from their head

Step 2; Let the child remove T-shirt from their neck

Step 3; Let the child remove T-shirt with one arm in and one arm out

Step 4; Let the child remove the T-shirt with one arm in and one arm half out

Step 5; Let the child remove the T-shirt with both arms in and T-shirt pulled up to shoulders

Step 6; Let the child remove the T-shirt

Forward Chaining

This is when the child starts the task (e.g., putting the T-shirt over their head), and the adult helps with the later stages the child needs help with (e.g., putting their arms through the sleeves). The child needs to be motivated to begin the task themselves.

Always demonstrate the correct technique first, telling your child what you are doing at each stage e.g. I am unbuttoning the shirt, I am taking your arm out of the sleeve, and so on. Try to maintain the same order of this activity time for consistency.

Ensuring clothes are the correct way round

- Wear t-shirts, sweat shirts, pants etc with a picture on the front. Point the picture out to the child.
- Identify the back of all garments through having a label or using coloured thread. Encourage the child to find this mark to identify the back of their clothing. If necessary, and to avoid confusion, remove other labels, e.g. inside seam of knickers.
- Alternatively for top half garments, mark the inside, bottom front edge of the garment with coloured thread. Lay the garment out flat on a table (or the floor) front facing downwards. Roll up the bottom, back edge of the clothing to give a good grip to reveal the special mark identifying the front.
- Choose a coat with a contrasting lining. Encourage body awareness by naming parts of the body as placed into the garment.
- Lay clothes out flat in front of the child in the order that they are going to be put on. Place the end which is going to be put on first, nearest to your child. Place arms into the garment first so that it is easier for the child to see what they are doing. Then put the garment over their head.

Gripping the clothes

- Roll up clothing to create 'more' to grip, e.g. roll up bottom edge of the t-shirt before putting on.
- Use adult's hand over child's hand to assist grip (hand-over-hand technique).
- Avoid slippery fabrics.



Clothes and fastenings

Due to modern advances with clothing and fastenings e.g. Velcro instead of laces or buckles and generally more stretchy, looser materials, children no longer necessarily have the opportunity to practice skills such as tying shoelaces.

Socks

- Place socks partly over your child's foot, then encourage them to perform the last part.
- Sport tubular socks are easier than those with a heel.
- Socks with coloured heels and toes also make it easier to work out the correct way round. Alternatively mark the back of the sock with thread on the inside, top edge.
- Make sure that the elastic is not too tight, avoid tight fitting socks.
- Prompt your child to use their "magic thumbs" to help pull the socks on. i.e. isolating their thumbs to get them under the socks to pull up.
- Roll down the top of the sock to make it easier to get the foot in. Use a loop on the back of the sock for the child to hold as they pull them up.

Shoes

- On the inside of the shoes and pumps, mark the inside border of each piece of footwear with indelible ink. The child can then place these two marks together to ensure that the correct foot is inserted into each shoe.

Coat

- There are many different strategies, but this one is quite effective. Drape the coat over the back of a chair with the lining facing outwards and the sleeves freely hanging. The child stands with their back to the lining and puts each arm in turn into the sleeves. The child bends down to get the coat onto the shoulders and then moves up and away to release the coat.

Fastenings

Buttons

- Start practising with larger, flat buttons and then progressing to smaller ones. Ensure that the button hole is large enough for the button.
- Only undo the top few buttons when taking off a shirt/blouse, and then remove the garment over the head. It can be put on over the head and only a few buttons will need to be done up.
- Choose trousers or skirts with elastic waist bands if buttons and buckles are difficult.
- Velcro can be used instead of buttons, e.g. on a coat/shirt use Velcro and sew buttons on to top flap.
- Try leaving the cuff buttons done up. Alternatively sew a piece of elastic or a button attached with elastic thread across the cuffs so that it can be stretched open when the hand is pushed through.
- Allow your child to do up those which they can see (e.g. at the bottom of a shirt). Start the task if necessary but then allow your child to finish e.g. pull the button through. Replace frequently used buttons with smaller ones (e.g. on coat or cardigan) as these will be easier to do up and a good place to start.
- Buttons are easier to grasp if they are flat (instead of concave) large, textured or sewn slightly above the surface of the garment. Be sure buttonholes are large enough for buttoning ease (cut to make slightly larger of shirts).
- Talk through each stage of the task in terms of what the next step is – 'find the button', 'open the hole', 'push it through', 'grab it'.
- Buttonholes on new shirts are often tight and may need snipping slightly to open them up or just stretching by pushing the button through and back repeatedly.

Zip

- When buying a coat with an open ended zip, test the zip thoroughly as the ease of fastening can vary a lot.
- Attach a key ring or curtain ring to the zip to aid grip.



Help with tying shoe laces

Shoelaces are best learned in a step by step way. It is helpful to master the first step before moving onto the next. This technique is useful as you are in effect teaching a series of knots and your hands don't have to perform as many different moves.

Helpful strategies

Before moving onto shoelaces, it may be helpful to play some games that help you to learn some of the skills used. Here are some ideas to try:

- Ripping paper/card - to increase hand strength needed when tightening the lace
- Paper weaving, constructional toys, lacing games – can help you understand how the lace goes behind and is posted through
- Tying bows with ribbon, as this is less likely to slip
- Obstacle courses – practising concepts of under, over, around and through. Try copying these in a sequence
- Practice with two different coloured laces to make following the shoelace tying instructions easier.
- Try the technique below with a skipping rope over the child's foot to get the hand of the movements required

General principles

- Sit in a comfortable, balanced position, with your back against something
- Always practise using thicker "fluffier" or flat laces as opposed to thin elastic type round laces that you may find in some shoes. The thinner laces tend to come undone much more quickly. Ensure that the laces are long enough to comfortably tie a bow.
- It is easier to practise laces if the shoe is on your lap initially rather than on the foot. Once your child has got some idea about the task, it is easier for your child to see what they are doing if they are seated with their foot (and shoe) on a small stool or chair in front of them.
- Shoe templates can be purchased from Early Learning shops and are recommended for practice purposes

Steps to follow

Making a knot.....

- Take hold of the laces, one in each hand, then cross the laces over
- Where the lace has crossed, hold this in one hand
- Pass the upper lace under the lower lace, through the hole, in a toe to heel direction
- Grasp the end of each lace and pull tight to the sides
- Repeating these steps will help to hold the lace firm so that the bow can be tied more tightly.

Making the bow.....

- Make a loop with one of the laces. NB Make sure some of the lace is kept out of the loop
- Make a second loop with the other lace
- Cross the two loops over keeping hold of the loops at all times
- Hold the loops in one hand keeping this hand still for the rest of the procedure
- With the other hand, post the loop through as you did when tying the lace
- Pull the end of the loops to make the lace tight

Alternatives: Toggles, elastic laces, springy spiral laces, slip on shoes, Velcro, Greeper laces (www.greeper.com)

