

Developing Dressing skills

Suggested activities to develop dressing skills for young children:

Like any new skill, dressing is an activity that needs to be practised and involves lots of different components including hand strength, coordination, balance and understanding of sequence.

Avoid practising dressing when you are under time pressure i.e. getting ready to go out in the mornings.

Dressing is best practised when you have plenty of time. It is not meant to be a stressful activity but one that helps to develop your child's understanding of their body and promotes their independence and development.

Tips to remember:

- Dressing is a developmental skill.
- Children learn how to take their clothes off before they learn how to put them on.
- Children will find it easier to remove clothing when they are seated or have their back supported than if they are standing.
- The hardest task to master is usually coordinating arms and head for tops.

Helpful Strategies:

Socks- Pull the sock over the heel leaving it covering the toes and encourage your child to pull it off from the toes

Trousers- Pull them down over your child's bottom and encourage them to push the trousers down the rest of their legs

Tops- Pull the sleeves up to release your child's arms and pull the top up over the head but leave it covering the face and encourage your child to pull it away from their face over their head. If necessary, widen the neck opening by stretching it slightly: it can be tight when freshly washed. Practice with oversized or loose fitting shirts/jumpers. Gradually work towards correct size.

If the child struggles to locate front and back, try using shirts/jumpers with clear labels at the back or clear logos/pictures at the front.

Backward Chaining

Backward chaining is an approach designed to ensure a child experiences success when developing new skills. Initially, the adult helps with the whole task except for the very last bit, which the child is encouraged to complete on their own. Once the child has demonstrated they can do the last bit independently, you let them do the stage before. Each time they complete one stage you move back to the previous stage and so on until the child is completing the whole task themselves.

Visual Timetable

This can be a useful tool for children who have difficulty with knowing what order to put on clothing and/or staying on task.

- Identify all the steps involved in completing the task.
- Take some photos of your child completing each step or of the items required. Alternatively use a picture for each step.
- Assist your child to arrange the steps into the right order and stick the pictures on with blu-tack.
- Once the first step is complete, the child takes the picture off and puts it into a finished box, then moves onto the next step.
- You can provide extra motivation by setting a timer or by offering a reward for all the steps being completed correctly.



Moving onto buttons

- Ensure your child is using a pincer grip (tip of first finger and thumb). Practice activities to develop this grip if necessary.
- Practice fastening large buttons before moving onto smaller buttons.
- Make the hole slightly larger to enable the button to go through with ease.
- Encourage your child to help you do up the buttons on your coat, dressing up dolls and in dressing books (this will be easier as the button is directly in front of them).
- When doing up buttons on their clothes start with a button nearer the lap which is easy to see.
- Begin by putting the button half-way through the hole and encourage your child to pull it through fully (backward chaining approach).
- Show your child where to hold and demonstrate slowly.
- Give a simple verbal prompt such as “push through” and then go on to “pull through”
- Encourage your child to do up just one button and you do the rest then increase slowly.

