

## Sensory difficulties and dressing



Sensory sensitivities can cause children to be very selective about what they will wear. Try to get your child to be involved in choosing new clothing. This may give them a sense of control, increasing the chance of them starting to wear new clothes.

### **Tactile (touch):**

- Use comfortable clothes, consider type of fabric and length of sleeves.
- If the young person cannot tolerate labels, cut them out. Choose clothes with printed labels.
- If the young person cannot tolerate seams, undergarments can be worn to reduce friction. Socks can be worn inside out
- Specialist websites sell seamless clothing: [www.shop.sensory-smart.com](http://www.shop.sensory-smart.com)
- Choose shirts without rough collars and tops without appliqués, as the reverse sides may be stiff, textured or itchy. Try loose pants with elastic waistbands if jeans or other pants that zip feel heavy or rough.
- Also consider clothes that have been pre-worn and washed many times, such as hand-me-downs or charity shop bargains. This may be especially helpful for outerwear, which can be stiff when new.
- Garments made from synthetic materials can feel itchy or “weird” to children with tactile issues. Instead of man-made blends, consider buying natural, breathable fabrics, such as 100 percent cotton, soft—not scratchy—wool, bamboo and linen.
- If boxer shorts bother your son when they get hiked up on his thighs, opt for briefs instead. Likewise, choose swimming shorts without a netting liner. For girls, find a bra that fits without slipping down her shoulders—a sports bra or a racerback style may be a safe bet.
- Choose socks that won’t slouch or slip down inside shoes.
- If your child takes comfort in that “cocoon” feeling, try dressing them in layers. A t-shirt, hooded sweatshirt and vest might feel better to your child than, say, a light sweater.

### **Proprioceptive (Body awareness):**

- Dressing can be done in front of a mirror so as to provide visual cues to assist with sequencing, motor planning and body awareness.
- Preparation activity of drawing attention to the body by stretching, head shoulders knees and toes song, gentle or firm touch depending on sensory preference

### **Olfactory (Scent):**

Try washing and drying clothes in unscented products

## 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:

- You will most likely be providing full assistance to help your child dress. Backwards chaining involves you still doing this except for the very last bit. This is where the child is encouraged to complete the last stage on their own. Once the child mastered this – they then complete the previous step.  
e.g. Adult helps child put t-shirt on, child pulls the t-shirt down over their tummy. Once they have mastered this they may work on pulling head through and pulling t-shirt down.
- 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.

### Useful pointers :

- Be sure that the child is sitting supported either on a chair where their feet touch the floor, or on the floor with wall as support
- If necessary, widen the neck of a t-shirt by stretching it slightly
- Establish a routine. Always follow the same order for putting on clothes.
- Undressing is easier – start with this
- Be sure to give clear instructions
- Show the child how they can tell if the garment is inside out
- Play dressing up games at home
- Give praise appropriately.
- Plan dedicated time to practice and plenty of time for the child to succeed, do not attempt it on the day you are running late for school or an event
- Try to minimize distractions
- Try with oversized shirts/jumpers, if necessary. Gradually work towards correct size.
- If the child struggles to locate front and back, try using shirts/jumpers with logos/pictures at the front.

