

# Dressing Skills

## DESCRIPTION

Dressing and undressing skills are very much a part of everyday life for all of us. The act of dressing and undressing oneself completely independently can be a complicated and difficult process.

## PRE-REQUISITE for dressing are:

- **Motor Skills** e.g. Balance, co-ordinating movements and fine motor skills.
- **Sensory Skills** e.g. Track objects with eyes, discriminate differences in size and shape, handle different textures and identify objects by touch only.
- **Body Scheme** e.g. knowing where each body part relates in space, knowing that the body has two sides and a midline.

## HELPFUL HINTS

- Dress in front of a mirror to provide visual cues and use the mirror 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.



- Practice dressing and undressing during the weekend, this may reduce the impact of time pressures which impact on ability during the school week.
- Establish a routine to help to prevent confusion.
- Break each step of the activity into small stages and talk out loud through them. For instance when putting on a jumper make sure that the arms are out, that it's the right way around before putting it over the head.
- Allow extra time for your child to practice these new skills. These strategies may be more time consuming and you may therefore only have time to practise them 3-4 times a week to begin with. When practicing you should be as free from distraction as possible.
- Consider the texture of different clothing. Some children may need clothing labels to be removed, or may be uncomfortable in certain fabrics.



## ACTIVITY IDEAS

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### Pre-dressing Activities:

- Dressing up in a variety of clothes and costumes and play pretend games.
- Dressing and undressing dolls and teddies.
- 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 or play cubes. These can be made to give the child practice at certain types of fastening.
- Cloth button or popper book. Parts of a picture have to be buttoned or 'popped' on.
- Matching sock game. Place a variety of socks in a pile, the child has to find pairs and put them on.
- Wooden shoe – a shoe shaped piece of card with holes in can be used to practise lacing and tying shoes.
- Bow book. A fabric book with different types of materials to make a bow, eg ribbon, laces, apron strings, etc.
- Package wrapping. Making parcels and tying them up with different sorts of ties.
- Lacing pictures. Picture boards with holes in to lace threads through.
- Dressing cards, which require the child to identify the order that clothes are put on.

### Orientation:

- Encourage body awareness by naming parts of the body and then the piece of clothing that covers it.
- Help lay out clothes 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.

- Use cues such as labels to identify the front from the back of clothes.
- Buy underpants with pictures on the front to give a visual cue for dressing and socks with coloured heels and toes.
- Label shoes right and left if necessary.

### Positioning:

- Be sure your child is sitting or standing comfortably with support as needed on a chair, the floor, a bed, or against a wall.
- Some children may sit better in a corner where both walls give added support.
- Sit next to, in front of, or directly behind the child during activity. Guide the child through the task. For some children, it may help to sit in front of a mirror.

## LEARNING NEW SKILLS

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### Forward Chaining:

- Encourage your child to do the first step of an activity e.g. stepping into pants and then you assist them to pull them up.
- Allow them to go as far as they can, providing assistance before any frustration or distress occurs.
- Reduce the assistance gradually by increasing the steps your child does independently.
- This strategy can be used with single items or the entire process of dressing i.e. Start with pants and then provide assistance with following items of clothing.
- Ensure each part or step of the task done by your child is positively reinforced.

### Backward Chaining:

- Allow your child to do the last step of the activity i.e. you put their socks onto their toes and they then pull them up.
- Your child will gain reinforcement by the tasks completion, reducing their frustration.



