

# Sensory Advice for Dressing



## DESCRIPTION

Dressing is a complicated activity requiring planning, organising and manipulating clothing. The child must have body awareness, controlled balance and movement and be able to tolerate different sensations. A child with sensitivities to touch and movement can find dressing a stressful experience.

The following suggestions are based upon using the sensory systems to help your child become more accepting of dressing tasks.

## HELPFUL HINTS

Your child may find the smell, or feel of clothing uncomfortable/ distracting. They may also find the act of being dressed difficult.

- Be conscious of the feel of materials, buying clothing that you know your child will like. They may prefer softer fabrics like fleece rather than rigid items like denim.
- Cut labels out of clothing.
- Wash and dry clothing in unscented detergent/ fabric softener.
- Dry clothing in a dryer if possible to decrease stiffness.
- Be aware of patterns in fabrics and distractions the patterns may cause.

## ACTIVITY IDEAS

### Preparing your child for dressing:

These strategies and activities can help to relax the nervous system, working towards reducing your child's exaggerated responses to sensory input. Observe your child when completing these. Stop if your child becomes anxious or distressed.

- Slow rhythmic movement such as swinging or rocking in one direction i.e. back and forth or side to side.
- **Row the Boat:** use a skipping rope, or hold hands. Sit facing your child with feet outstretched and touching. Do controlled push and pull movements like a rowing exercise.
- **Bear Hugs:** combine your bear hugs with gentle rocking back and forth for extra calming effect.



- Deep pressure to muscles and joints such as massage, back rub or firm squeezing.
- Blanket wrap or swaddling for a younger child.
- Snuggling in a sleeping bag.
- Bean bag chair or large pillows.

Proprioceptive activities i.e. those that include heavy work to muscles, traction or compression through joints, or strong contraction of muscles around joints.

- Moving furniture, heavy boxes, by pushing them along the floor.
- Standing press ups against the wall.

You may also like to try:

- Warm or tepid bath.
- Sucking.
- Fidget toys.
- Lavender, vanilla, banana or soothing smells.

### **PRACTICING DRESSING:**

- Reduced noise and light levels (turn off the radio, TV and lights).
- Break the dressing skill down into small steps. Teach the last part of the activity first such as pulling the T shirt down over the body. Then teach the second last and third last activity e.g. putting arms in the sleeves and then putting head in.
- Dress the child in front of a mirror to help them to develop their body awareness and with motor planning.

- Consider the position that your child gets dressed in. If they find movement difficult stand them in one position or sit down.
- If they find balance difficult have your child sit down to put on socks and shoes and the legs of trousers.
- If your child has sensitive feet, have them wear socks inside out and wash shoes to make them soft prior to wearing them.
- Try dressing dolls or teddy bears to practice opening and closing fasteners.
- Increase hat tolerance through massage of the scalp and putting the hat on in front of the mirror.

### **ORGANISATION:**

- Organise drawers and closets to help enable a child to choose his own clothing.
- Organise clothing the night before and lay the clothing out.
- Encourage your child to put it away so that he knows where it belongs.

### **OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER:**

- Choose shoes with Velcro closures and add Velcro to button backs and hoops to zips for children who have fine motor difficulties.
- Transitions for seasons may take time: discuss it, prepare for it, and use social stories to explain the change.

