

Dressing

Learning how to get dressed can be hard for children. Getting dressed is an important skill for children to learn as it can help build their confidence and independence while also giving your child a sense of achievement. Having different strategies can help your child learn how to get dressed. This handout will provide you with general strategies to help your child with getting dressed.



Where to start?



Often younger children will start with pulling on and off easy-to-remove clothing items like socks and shoes, and they may even try to put these clothing items back on again. As a parent you can help to build on this early awareness by naming the items of clothes your child has taken off and also naming the parts of the body the clothing items go on. You can also start to give younger children choices in what they want to wear, such as having two outfits for them to pick from, to help them feel included and interested in the dressing process. You can also name the items of clothing and the body parts they go on as they are picking out their outfits.



Tips for Teaching Dressing

Here are a few tips that can make the dressing process easier for your child:

- It is easier to learn how to get undressed than to get dressed so you may want to start with teaching your child how to get undressed.
- Loose clothing is easier to put on/take off than tighter clothing.
- Be consistent with the dressing task, such as using the same steps and in the same way (e.g., starting with the same side of the body) when dressing.
- Work on getting dressed at the same time each day during their daily routine.
- Ensure you have lots of time to teach dressing as you don't want your child to feel rushed.
- Work on dressing in the same location.
- Minimize any distractions.
- End dressing tasks with praising your child.

Clothing

When it is time to let your child start learning how to get dressed it can help to have clothes that are easier to put on and take off.

Some easy to put on/off clothing items are:

- Pants that have elastic bands.
- Looser pants that are not too tight.
- Clothes with Velcro or larger buttons.
- Clothing, such as t-shirts and underwear that have pictures on the front to help your child know which side is the front versus the back.
- Clothing that is easy and comfortable for your child to move around in.
 - It is important to remember that all children have different sensory needs, some children may not like the rough feeling of jeans and prefer the softer feeling of track pants or some children may prefer tighter shirts over looser shirts. It is important to work with your child and consult an Occupational Therapist to determine what clothing would work best for your child and help make the dressing process a fun and comfortable experience for them.



How to Teach Dressing Skills

Occupational Therapists use strategies such as backward chaining and forward chaining which you can also do with your child at home to help them learn to get dressed.

Backward chaining

- This strategy is used to break down the task of getting dressed into small and manageable steps. When first starting with backwards chaining the parent/Occupational Therapist will help the child with all the steps of getting dressed EXCEPT the last one, the child will only do the last step. As they start to master the final step, you will gradually let them do more of the dressing. For example, the parent will put the t-shirt over the child's head and help the child put their arms through the sleeves of the t-shirt and the child will pull the shirt down. As time progresses, and the child masters pulling their shirt down, the parent will do less of the steps so the parent puts the shirt over the child's head and helps the child put one arm through the sleeve of the shirt but lets the child put their arm through the other sleeve of the shirt independently and then the child will pull their shirt down on their own. Using backwards chaining allows your child to do the end steps, which allows them to feel a sense of achievement that they have completed the task of putting their shirt/clothing on and will also allow them to work on mastering the whole task.



How to Teach Dressing Skills Continued

Forward chaining

- This strategy is the opposite of backward chaining. Forward chaining is when your child starts with the task and the parent/Occupational Therapist will help with the later steps of dressing. With forward dressing it is important to motivate your child to begin the task on their own. It is also important to demonstrate the correct way to get dressed while telling your child what you are doing each step of the way. An example of forward chaining is the child starts by putting their shirt over their head and the parent will help the child put their arms through the sleeves of the shirt and then pull it down. As they master the first step, you can start to allow your child to do the next step and working on mastering this step until moving to the next and eventually they will do the whole task on their own.

It is important to work with your child and Occupational Therapist to determine if either backward chaining or forward chaining works for your child.

Extra Tips for Dressing

1. Coat flip: putting on coats can be tricky for children; using the coat flip method can help your child put their coat on independently. First they will need to put their jacket on a flat surface with the inside of the coat facing up. They will then need to stand near the top of their coat (next to the collar/hood). They will then put their arms into the sleeves of the coat and flip the jacket over their head. Here is a link to a video that can show you how to do the coat flip
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5s2e-Cxas0k>
2. Dress-up: another fun way to engage your child in practicing to get dressed is to have dress-up clothes for them play with during the day.
3. Dressing up toy dolls: dressing up toy dolls is a great way to have your child practice dressing and seeing the process of dressing.

