

Introduction to dressing skills

This leaflet is an overview of general ideas that can help. Please also see our other leaflets about learning to put on different types of clothing.

Learning to dress is a complex skill which requires lots of regular practice and can take time.

Encourage your child to do as much as they can for themselves.



Where do I start?

Environment/preparation

- Quiet room
- Have everything you need ready, including any visual prompts e.g. picture sequence
- Talk to your child about what you are going to do before you start
- Start with undressing – this is easier than dressing.
- Sit somewhere comfortable and stable where your child is supported – this makes it easier to think about the task in hand and not balancing!
- Put things in the same order and use the same techniques/routine each time.

Timing

- Go at your child's pace
- Give lots of praise for practising skills even if they are not successful at completing the task straight away.
- Break it down and take things one step at a time – further information about the different aspects of dressing can be found in our other leaflets.



- Little and often can be better than spending a long time practicing one thing.
- Let your child do it themselves sometimes - they may do more when left alone.

Clothing

- Use loose fitting clothing with elastic waists, wide neck and arm holes.
- Ensure clothes are the right way round before starting!
- Talk about what you are doing as you are doing it: asking questions encourages independent problem solving.

Being aware

- Encourage your child to look at what you and they are doing.
- Encourage your child to look at themselves (maybe in a mirror) and decide if everything is right – if not, can they work out what is wrong themselves?



Try these different techniques for learning dressing skills

Adapt the clothing

Could the items used for the task be more straightforward whilst your child is learning? E.g. looser clothing, bigger buttons.



Change the environment

Could the environment or surroundings be changed to make the task easier?

- quieter room
- no TV
- reorganising where things are kept
- can your child sit down to complete the task?

Grading

- Break the task into small steps and gradually involve your child more over time.
- It's ok to start very small and provide some support.
- Encourage the next step in the task when they are ready.



Backward chaining

Here the adult begins the task, with the child only doing the last step. Gradually the adult does less as the child can do more for themselves. This way they always get the reward of finishing the task, e.g. you put the T-shirt over your child's head and help them to get their arms through the holes. Your child then pulls down the T-shirt at the front and gets their reward!



Forward chaining

This is when the child starts the task (e.g. putting the T-shirt over their head), and the adult helps with the later stages where more help is needed (e.g. putting their arms through the sleeves). Your child needs to be motivated to begin the task themselves for this approach to work.

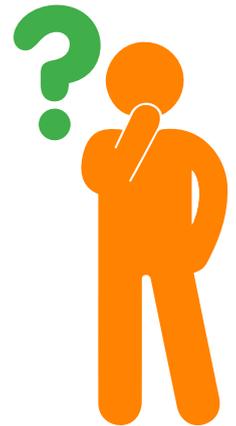
Visual prompts

- Using a sequence of photographs or symbols to support a dressing routine can be useful for some children.
- Encourage your child to look at the visual prompts at each step and consider what they need to do.



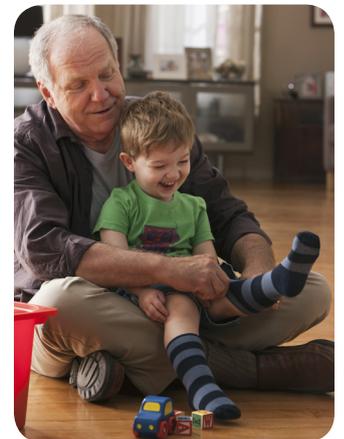
Problem solving approach

- Asking questions rather than instructing or telling encourages independent problem solving and supports the child to come up with their own strategies for dressing successfully.
- For children aged 6+ who have good communication, an "ask don't tell" approach could be used to support independence in dressing skills.
- For example, ask your child:
 - what comes next?
 - what would help them remember?
 - is each step complete?Encourage checking appearance/neatness and whether items look or feel right.



Hand over hand

This involves standing behind or next to the child and placing your hands over theirs. You can then physically assist them with gripping, pulling or completing the movements that the task requires, e.g. pulling on socks.



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