



General Dressing Skills

Getting dressed and undressed is very much part of our everyday life but it is not uncommon for children to find it difficult. Dressing is a complex activity and children need to be able to master a number of skills to be successful in increasing independence:

Motor skills - Where a child needs to be able to move his or her limbs and body in a full range of movements requiring muscle strength and flexibility at their joints.

Fine Motor Skills - Being able to reach, grasp and release objects to complete tasks like buttoning or holding an item of clothing.

Co-ordination - Where a child needs to be able to move both hands at the same time but each doing something slightly different to do things like buttons.

Balance - Being able to maintain position while they change posture to get dressed both with eyes open and closed.

Perception - Understanding the different sizes and shapes of buttons or knowing the size of arm holes.

Stereognosis – Knowing where your limbs are in space, e.g. knowing where your fingers are in relation to the button without looking.

Body Schema - Being able to tell right from left and the difference between arms and legs.

Learning New Skills

Children learn in many different ways so you might need to vary your approach. You are the expert in your child and you know what approaches might work better than others, different techniques can be used on their own or a combination of things depending on what suits. Please be aware that some children cannot look and listen at the same time so limit the amount of information you give.

Try...

- Physically assist your child, try using a hand-over-hand technique
- Doing the task alongside your child
- Give a running commentary and talk through each of the steps required for the task using clear and consistent language

Break down the task

Breakdown each step of the activity into small stages and give a running commentary of what you are doing can help, try with your child writing down the different steps of the activity, what can they already do and what are they struggling with?

Example:

- Prepare by putting a top front side down on the child's lap
- Pick up the back of the top up and place it over your head
- Push one arm through the sleeve
- Push the other arm through the sleeve
- Pull the t-shirt down
- Check yourself out in the mirror

Backwards Chaining

Backward chaining has been found to be particularly useful when learning self-care skills. It involves you doing the steps of the activity and the child completing the last bit, this can help to give them a sense of achievement.

Breakdown the task into simple steps or stages and complete all of the steps of the task except for the last one, teach your child this step first.

Example:

You: lay the t-shirt down, place it over the child's head, ask them to put their arms in each sleeve

You: teach your child to pull down the t-shirt

Practice, practice, practice this step until your child can do it without your help

Now complete the all the steps except for the last two for your child and repeat until they are able to complete all steps independently.

Helpful Hints

Remember it's not a race! You may find that your child makes most progress when they are most motivated so waiting until they are ready to learn can help reduce frustration and fear of failure.

Setting the scene - make sure they are sitting comfortably with minimal distractions in a stable and comfortable position.

1st remember that undressing is usually mastered before dressing. Work on this area first.

Time can be difficult to manage in the morning especially when everyone is rushing to get out of the house! Try to involve them in at least some aspect of dressing themselves every day. You may find it easier to work on these skills in the evening, weekends or holidays when there is more time.

Resist the urge to take over too soon, give your child the time and opportunity to figure out what went wrong themselves, along with bucket loads of encouragement. If necessary, talk them through what to do and only step in if they get really stuck.

Routine - establishing and doing the activity the same each time can help to establish skills.

Texture - consider the texture of clothing, some children don't like the feel of labels which might need removing or seams of the socks which can help if you turn them inside out.

Go large and try using clothes that are too big as these are easier to manage.

Look and check in the mirror to encourage them to identify any mistakes.

Remember to praise, encourage and be positive, they will get there in the end!

Example Steps

Putting on Pants/Trousers:	Putting on Socks:	Putting on Shoes:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sit on floor, bed or chair• Hold the material by waistband, look for label at the back or a picture/zip/button on the front• Reach down and lift one leg into hole• Put other leg into the second hole• Pull the item up to the knees• Stand up and pull them up to the waist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sit on floor, bed or chair• Hook both thumbs into opening of sock and hold onto edge• Push toes into sock• Lift foot and pull sock over heel• Pull sock up leg	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sit on floor, chair or stairs• Slip shoe over toes• Place the index finger inside the heel of the shoe and pull the shoe the rest of the way over their foot• Place foot on the floor and stand up to push foot down into shoe• Fasten

Allow extra time for your child to practice these new skills