



## One Handed Dressing Skills

With support, many children can find interesting and unique ways to dress themselves independently using only one hand. This support can come in different ways depending on how your child learns best but they probably already have a good grasp on some problem solving skills! Most important is to make learning new skills fun and interesting, not stressful! The child is developing skills that they will use for their lifetime so treat skill development as a marathon and not a sprint, this is not something to be measured against anyone else.

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

When we have a differential between strength and control of our limbs there are some simple tricks that can really help:

- When **undressing** try removing dominant side **first**
- When **dressing** try putting the dominant side in **last**

It is important to find just the right level of challenge so look at what they can already do and what you can help them with. If there is some function in both limbs it is important to use both if possible to avoid learnt non use. It does not matter how much or how little each arm is able to do as long as it is being involved. This could be simply as a weight to hold something in place or as a support to aid their balance.

## Hints and Tips

Never start on a day where you do not have very much time, start on a weekend, evening or relaxed time of the day/week.

You may find that your child makes most progress when their motivation is high so waiting until they are ready to learn can help reduce frustration and the fear of failure.

Set the scene, make sure they are sitting comfortably with minimal distractions in a stable and comfortable position and let them use different objects in their surroundings to help them – wall, chair, door etc.

Often undressing is mastered before dressing and loose fitted oversized items before tight ones.

Resist the urge to rush in a take over too soon, give your child the time to explore different ways to do things and develop their own unique problem solving skills. The opposite response comes into effect if the child is becoming increasingly frustrated because they are struggling. If this is the case then focusing on what they are able to do as a starting point can be helpful and encouraging.

Start with the things they will need to master first. Lowering and raising pants/skirt/trousers/shorts so they can gain independent toileting skills can be a good place to start.

Raising and lowering underwear is an essential skills for developing independent toileting skills but equally important is having everything you need to hand on the right side for your child. A method often used is to work the clothes up or down alternating between sides until the underwear is in the correct position.

Tube socks that do not have a heal can make putting socks on easier and socks with a large opening can make this task easier.

When putting on tops, put the weaker side in first, over the head then other arm.

Learning to do buttons one handed can take a while and your child needs to have appropriate fine motor skills to be able to master this. Start with posting coins through slots and developing different in-hand manipulation skills.

With zips putting an extra handle onto the zipper can make this easier to master. Try using your middle finger to keep the zip steady while you work it up.

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

## **Breakdown the task**

Together look at how much they are already able to do themselves just by having a go! Can they take items off, socks, shoes etc. Through breaking down the task and discussing which bits are easier than others can help guide the child to see which elements they might need some extra support with.

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

## **Backwards Chaining**

Backward chaining has been found to be particularly useful when learning self-care skills and can help to give the child a sense of achievement.

Breaking down 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.

**Allow extra time for your child to practice these new skills**