

CARE & LEARNING SERVICE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ADVICE FOR DRESSING SKILLS

If your child is finding undressing/dressing difficult the following suggestions may be helpful:

- Learning to undress should be attempted first as undressing is an easier skill than dressing. Undressing before bed is a good time to start as you have more time at night than in the morning.
- Follow a consistent sequence and technique when dressing:
 - Clothes can be placed in a pile in the order in which they need to be put on.
 - Follow the same technique for each garment, eg t-shirt is put over the head first and then the arms are put through the sleeves.
 - The order and technique can be written down so that it can be followed by other carers and school staff. You could use pictures as a visual prompt to help your child remember the clothing order/technique.
- Get your child to put clothes out the night before, arranged so that they can see the items they need and the order in which to use them.
- Talk your child through the order in which clothes are put on, ie which are put on first; draw attention to the different parts of their body whilst doing this.
- Choose loose fitting clothes with minimum buttons. Look for tops with easy neck openings, stretchy socks, etc.
- Demonstrate push and pull actions. You could teach your child the process of pulling on and pushing off sleeves, eg by playing games with rings or stretchy bands of material on their arms to push on/pull off. Loops sewn inside trouser waistband may help your child to pull up trousers.
- To practice gripping the clothes, roll up clothing to create “more” to grip, eg roll up bottom edge of the t-shirt before putting on. Use adult’s hand over child’s hand to assist grip (hand-over-hand technique) and avoid slippery fabrics.



- Ensure your child is well supported; sitting on a small chair or stool can help, or sitting on the floor with their back against a wall.
- To help your child distinguish between back and front it may be helpful to mark one side with a coloured label or patch or choose clothes which have a design on the front.
- Take advantage of the labels on the garment to indicate to your child where the top of their trousers or jumper is and to also indicate the inside of the garment.
- Let your child complete as many of the steps involved in dressing as they can.
- Reduce distractions – ideally in a quiet room with the TV off.
- Do not rush when practising, eg start with getting ready for bed in the evening rather than dressing for school in the morning.
- Adapt clothing to help your child cope at school, eg shoes with Velcro, elastic laces, toggles on coats, etc.
- Encourage your child to use a mirror to check how they look, eg to see if their sweatshirt is pulled down at the back. Dressing in front of a mirror helps some children organise themselves while they are getting dressed.

BACKWARD CHAINING:

- Backwards chaining is a useful method that gives some children a sense of achievement when dressing. The idea is that your child completes the last part of the dressing task, so that they get the reward of completing the task. As their skills develop they can carry out more and more of the task until they can do it all, eg putting on socks:
 - Place the sock on your child's foot and encourage them to pull the sock up their leg.
 - Next they pull the sock over their heel and up their leg.
 - Then they pull the sock over their foot and heel and up their leg.

BUTTONS & ZIPS:

- Practise doing up the buttons or zipper on a garment in front of the child on a table when it is not being worn so your child can see clearly which movements are necessary.
- Start practising with larger, flat buttons and progress onto smaller ones. Buttons are easier to grasp if they are flat (instead of concave), large, textured or sewn slightly above the surface of the garment.
- Be sure buttonholes are large enough for buttoning ease (cut to make slightly larger of shirts).



- Talk through each stage of the task in terms of what the next step is, ie “find the button”, “open the hole”, “push it through”, “grab it”.
- Place half the button through the hole and get your child to complete the task.
- Try larger zips than the usual ones to make it easier or add a ring to zip fasteners to make them easier to grasp and pull up.

SHOES:

- Try Velcro fastenings or elastic shoe laces (perhaps together with a shore horn) these are available from running or sports shops.
- Make a mark on the inside wall of both shoes to help children put the correct shoe on the correct foot.

SOCKS:

- Use tube socks with no specific heel to position to begin with.
- Try socks with a different colour heel for easy visual clue.
- Place socks partly over your child’s foot, then encourage them to perform the last part.
- Make sure that the elastic is not too tight, avoid tight fitting socks.
- Prompt your child to use their “magic thumbs” to help pull the socks on, ie isolating their thumbs to get them under the socks to pull up.
- Roll down the top of the sock to make it easier to get the foot in.
- Use a loop on the back of the sock for the child to hold as they pull them up.



SHOELACES: See Shoelaces Information Sheet

GAMES TO HELP LEARN DRESSING & UNDRRESSING:

The following is a list of games/activities that aim to help you child develop dressing skills. They can be done at home, school or nursery:

- Use hoop to climb through and pass over the head and down to practice body awareness skills for dressing.
- Wrapping packages as a way to practise tying. Have your child keep some important toys/items in a box. Each day they untie the box to take out the toy and then retie it to put it away.
- Threading and lacing games.

- All types of dressing up games.
- Undressing/dressing a doll.
- Musical dressing, ie a pile of clothes is put in the centre and your child puts on as many clothes as they can while the music is playing. The dressing stops when the music does.
- Putting on an apron or old shirt before doing water, sand or paint play.
- Matching sock game, ie place a number of pairs of socks in the centre of a circle. When the whistle blows the children race to find a matching pair of socks and be the first to put them on.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Backward Chaining:

This is a useful method that gives a child a sense of achievement and motivates them to learn how to dress. An adult carries out the dressing task for the child and then lets the child complete the last part of the task, so that they get the reward of completing the task. As the child's skill develops, they begin to carry the previous step as well and continue to work backwards until they can do it all.

For Example:

Putting on a T-shirt

The adult puts the t-shirt over the child's head and helps them to get their arms through the holes. The child completes the task by pulling down the t-shirt at the front.

Putting on Trousers

The adult pulls the trousers up and does the zip. The child completes the task by fastening the button.

Choose one method of learning and try to maintain the same order for consistency.