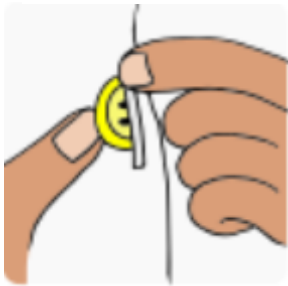


Self-Care

Developing Dressing Skills

When children learn how to dress themselves it is a huge accomplishment. Independent dressing is a skill that needs to be taught, practiced often and will take time.

Children begin to develop these skills from around 12 – 18 months. They will start to be able to help you as you dress them by holding out a foot for you to put a sock on and push their arms through their sleeves. Next, they will learn



to undress, taking off socks, pyjamas and anything without fastenings. The next step is for them to learn to put on clothing that without fastenings, followed by being able to take off and put on their clothes with some help with fastenings. Finally, they will be able to dress and undress independently and manage fastenings by themselves.

General Tips: -

- Introduce dressing by using dressing toys, dress up costumes and imaginative play.
- Encourage your child to handle clothes. They can help to hang out clothes, or sort clothes into colours and types.
- Find a routine that suits you and your child. If weekday mornings are busy, it may be easier to practice at bedtimes or at the weekends.
- Allow your child to choose their own clothes and lay them out the night before in the correct sequence. This is often easier if you lay them out side by side to start with rather than on top of each other.
- Start with undressing, as this is easier and can be done later in the day as part of the bedtime routine.
- Ideally sit next to, in front of, or directly behind your child during the activity to guide him or her through the task.



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- Ideally, they should be seated on a chair or a stool where they can put their feet flat on the floor. If the child is quite small, using the bottom step on a set of stairs may be easier. If their seated balance is poor, they can lean against a wall.
- Talk through dressing, naming items and describing what you are doing e.g., “right foot in”, “now stand up whilst I pull your trousers up”.
- Start small and move up. Initially, the child should try putting on socks, or pulling up trousers. Loose fitting clothes are easier to manage than tight fitting clothing. Start with pyjamas or clothes which are a bit too big. You can make it fun by swapping clothes so they try on your clothes and you try on theirs. Once they can successfully put on loose fitting clothes, they can then try tighter fitting clothes.
- When your child is struggling, it can be tempting to take over – don't! Give them time to work it out for themselves, giving them hints and guidance. Only step in if they get really stuck. Practice these tricky skills when you have lots of time.
- If you notice they have made a mistake, such as their buttons don't match or shoes on the wrong feet, ask them to look in the mirror and get them to work out what's wrong. You may need to give them clues by asking them questions.
- Consider using a visual schedule or chart with photos of instructions broken down step by step to support what order to put their clothes on in or as part of their morning routine. They need to know their pants go on before their trousers or leggings. (See below for more information)
- Place a large mirror in front of your child when dressing so they can see what they are doing.
- If a child refuses to dress themselves, you could use a reward chart system to encourage participation and ultimately independence.



Adapted from our colleagues : NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde – KIDS (www.nhsggc.org.uk/KIDS)

- Adapt clothing to make it easier for your child at school, i.e. elastic waistbands, larger buttons, Velcro shoes, elastic laces, larger polo shirts or toggles on zips.
- Cut a sticker in half and place one part in each shoe or draw a dot on the inside edge of each shoe. Encourage them to match up the picture to help them put their shoes on the right feet.
- If the child has one side of the body weaker or tighter than the other, dress that side first. If undressing, remove the weaker/tighter side last.
- Take your time and be consistent. Learning new skills takes time and everyone learns at their own pace. Keep providing them with the support they need at each stage until you feel they have made progress, before introducing the next steps towards dressing independently.
- **Practice, practice, practice! Give them opportunities every day!**

Backward Chaining:



When teaching new skills, we often start at the beginning. This can be challenging for some children and cause them to become frustrated and/or demotivated. Backward chaining can give them a sense of achievement and can be very useful when learning self-care skills such as dressing or teaching younger children.

You will need to break down each task of dressing into small steps. You begin the task, with your child only doing the last step. Explain to them throughout each step what you are doing. Gradually you do less as your child is able to do more of the task by themselves. This way your child gets the reward of always finishing the task.

You can use backward chaining for each type of clothing as well as for each type of fastening, such as buttons, zips and shoelaces. Here is an example for putting on socks, which shows how you can break down the task into small steps.

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Adult sits on floor behind or next to child and encourage the child to use both hands.

Step 1

Adult puts child's socks on up to just below the ankle, child pulls socks up.



Step 2

Adult puts child's sock on, the top of the sock just over the heel of the foot, child pulls socks up from the heel of the foot.



Step 3

Adult places socks just below the heel, child pulls socks up.



Step 4

Adult placed child's sock on toes, child pulls socks up



Step 5

Child puts toes into socks and pulls up independently.



Ensure clothes are the right way round:

Children often struggle to know which way round clothing goes on and end up with them inside out or back to front.

Try: -



- Choose t-shirts, sweatshirts, pants etc with a picture on the front. Point the picture out to your child.
- Identify the back of all garments through having a label or using coloured thread. Encourage your child to find this mark to identify the back of their clothing. If necessary, and to avoid confusion, remove other labels, e.g. inside seam of knickers.
- Alternatively for top half garments, mark the inside, bottom front edge of the garment with coloured thread. Lay the garment out flat on a table (or the floor) front facing downwards. Roll up the bottom, back edge of the clothing to give a good grip to reveal the special mark identifying the front.
- Choose a coat with a contrasting lining.
- Encourage body awareness by naming parts of the body as placed into the garment.
- Lay clothes out flat in front of your child in the order that they are going to be put on. Place the end, which is going to be put on first, nearest to your child. Place arms into the garment first so that it is easier for them to see what they are doing. Then put the garment over their head.



- Encourage them to look in a mirror when dressing and once they've finished putting their clothes on and get them to work out if anything is wrong. Ask them questions to give hints of anything on the wrong way.
- Play the inside out game. Lay out a row of tee-shirts, some the correct way round and some inside out. Can they tell you which ones are inside out? They can then practice turning the inside out ones the right way round. Choose a suitable reward.



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Checklists and Visual Schedules:

These are helpful to remind children which clothes to put on and in what order. You can use photos of your child's actual clothing or find images that you and your child like to increase their engagement. If you don't have access to a printer, then you can write one out or have your child draw a picture of themselves and the individual items of clothing. You can also keep it simpler by making a checklist of the clothes and what order they go on.

Example of dressing checklist: -

School clothes

- Pants/Vest**
- Socks/Tights**
- Top, for example – Shirt/Polo shirt**
- Skirt /Trousers**
- Jumper**
- Shoes/Boots**
- Jacket**
- Get dressed!**

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Further resources:

For more advice to help with dressing skills please visit our website or lookout for our Facebook posts.

Click on the “Meeting your Child’s Sensory Needs” tab on our website for information about some of the sensory behaviour your child may be displaying when dressing and strategies for you to try, helping you to meet their needs.

www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/cypot



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