Occupational Therapy
Strategies

Dressing Skills

Provided by: The Children’s Occupational Therapy Service
Telephone: 0151 233 5989
STAGES OF DRESSING

Young people learn to dress and undress themselves over time. The stages below break down the different elements of dressing into easy chunks and gives you an idea of what to encourage the child to do next.

Stage 1
- Pulls off shoes and socks.
- Holds out arms and legs to put them in sleeves and trouser legs.
- Starts to play with teddy’s clothes.

Stage 2
- Helps to push down underwear and pants.

Stage 3
- Removes pants and underwear.
- Pulls pants and underwear up with help.
- Puts on a jumper.
- Removes unfastened coat or dress.

Stage 4
- Puts on front buttoning shirt or jacket - needs help with fastenings.

Stage 5
- Pulls up own pants.
- Puts on shoes and socks – needs help fastening.
- Dresses with assistance only.

Stage 6
- Undresses without help.
- Knows front and back of clothing, may still make some mistakes.
- Learns to fasten Velcro shoes.

Stage 7
- Learns to tie a single knot.
- Uses buttons, zips, snaps and hooks – needs help with top button.
- Learns to orientate clothing correctly.

Stage 8
- Learns to fasten top button.
- Learns to tie laces.
- Learns to fasten tie.
- Dressing and undresses independently.

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GAMES TO IMPROVE MY DRESSING SKILLS

😊 Play catch or kick a ball with the child to improve coordination
Simple games of catching, throwing and kicking involve many of the underlying skills necessary for learning how to get dressed. When catching a ball, a child brings their hands to midline (needed for unzipping, buttoning, etc.). When throwing a ball, a child rotates their trunk and brings their arms across their midline during the follow through phase (needed to reach for socks and shoes). When kicking a ball, a child has to stand on one foot while the other side of the body is moving (needed for getting pants on and off in standing).

😊 Imitation Games to develop body awareness
- Simon Says – encourage full arm and leg extension.
- Make a star, tucked, pencil, corner and seated shape.
- Make superman, press up, upside down superman shapes.
- Ask the child to imitate you touching different body parts with each hand.
- “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes” song.

😊 Exercise Ball Activities to develop core stability, and upper limb strength
- Sit and bounce on exercise ball or peanut ball.
- Throw and catch a small ball using an overhead throw.
- Lie over a large round or peanut shaped ball, walk on hands or position 1 hand on floor while over hand draws, matches pairs, sort pompoms with tweezers etc...
- Games involving pouring e.g. water play or sand play.
- Ask the child to lie with their belly on the floor and throw a ball at a target. To make this activity more challenging: change the size of the ball.

- Animal Games to improve core strength and coordination
  - Bear walks – walking on all fours (feet or knees).
  - Bunny hops – On all fours, move hands forward then jump feet in towards hands.
  - Crab walks – walk sideways on hands and feet with belly facing up.
  - Camel walks - right hand and foot move together, left hand and foot move together.
  - Snake crawl or army crawl.

😊 Clapping/Stamping to develop memory and sequencing skills
- Use hands and/or feet to make a rhythm or sequence, child then copies this. Start simple and make sequences longer or incorporate different body parts.
- Use drum sticks to create rhythms.
- Nursery rhymes and playground clapping games such as pat-a-cake.

😊 Putty activities to develop hand strength and pincer grasp
- Pinching, twisting, pulling and cutting out shapes with biscuit cutters.
- Using paper clips, cocktails sticks, and buttons to model animals, plants and characters.

😊 Table top games to improve fine motor skills
- Jenga, chairs, pick-up sticks, (anything that requires a pincer grasp)
  Threading, sorting shapes with tweezers, posting coins, playing with lego/duplo
Making collages, cards, paper Mache models.

PLANNING AND SEQUENCING SKILLS

Setting up the Environment
- Place all clothes in the order they will be needed. Make sure they are all the right way round
- Remove clutter and minimise visual distractions
- Have a consistent place to store materials/objects.
- Ensure that there is a mirror for the child to use when they are dressing.

Things to Look For
- Teach the child to look for labels on the garments which show where the top is.
- Get the child to regularly check themselves in the mirror. If something does not look right, it is recommended that you ask them questions to identify what it is and how to fix it, rather than correcting it for them.

Sequencing
- Practice sequencing dressing by making picture cards of the process and get the child to arrange them in the right order.
- To organise dressing and get things on in the right order get the child to lay out their clothes in order of what comes first.
- Follow the same routine when undressing / dressing and place clothes in neat pile e.g. undressing - begin from head to toe.
- Use a dressing chart to help the child to remember what to put on next. There is one at the end of this handout that might be helpful.

Important
- Always give plenty of praise for a job well done and for trying hard.
- Allow plenty of time. Do not rush!
COMMON DRESSING DIFFICULTIES

Difficulty balancing
The child should sit on a chair or bench when undressing their upper body, taking their shoes off and pulling their trousers off over their feet. This will help them to concentrate on what they are doing rather than their balance. As their skills improve, they can attempt to do these activities in standing.

Difficulty with buttons
- Teach the rhyme ‘pinch, push, pinch, pull’.
- Practice putting things through slots, starting with a piggy bank and other narrow slots to push pennies or buttons through, etc.
- Lacing cards and stringing beads build the concept of pushing through and pulling out.
- Cut out a small square of material with a buttonhole in it. The child should practice pushing the button through this.
- Use stiffer pieces of material with smaller holes to challenge the child further.
- Practice fastening and unfastening buttons on items laid out in front of them e.g. on dolls clothing, a cardigan laid out on a table top or a button board.
- To get extra fabric out of the way, create a strip of buttons and button holes, or cut off the panel of buttons, button holes and the collar off of an old shirt.
- When buttoning with the garment on the body, it is often easier to align the buttons at the bottom of the shirt and fasten buttons from bottom to top.
- Button in front of a mirror. This is especially helpful for managing the top buttons.

Difficulty with Zips
- Practice zipping/unzipping ‘attached’ zippers on items such as pencil cases, suitcases, back packs etc. These provide practice and strengthening opportunities.
- For ‘separated’ zips, i.e. those on jackets, show child that there is a slot under the zip by passing a pipe cleaner through it. Have the child practice pushing and pulling the pipe cleaner through that narrow slot.
- Use an analogy to help the child remember to push the track all the way into the zipper e.g. “park the car all the way in the garage so it doesn’t roll out” and “Keep the tracks flat as the train can’t go over hills”.
- A zipper ring – a small key ring or other attachment to the zipper tab, can make zippers easier for young people who have difficulty grasping the tab and pulling it down.

Difficulties with shoes/socks
• Place a small toy of interest inside the sock or shoe and see if the child can feel it, or even grab it!
• Practice with scrunchy bobbles: have the child pick them up, stretch them and place them over their ankles (this can help young people learn the skills required for putting on socks).
• Use slippers to practice putting on and taking off shoes. They are easier to get on and off but still require the same movement and a little bit of strength too!
• Practice with shoes and socks that are slightly larger for the child, as this is easier. But make sure that this is for practice only.
• Putting shoes on wrong foot - try drawing around the shoes placed side by side on a piece of paper. The child can use this template to check they have their shoes on the correct feet.

**Difficulty gripping clothes**
• Roll up clothing to create more to grip e.g. roll up the edge of a jumper before putting it on.
• Put elastic around waists or cuffs to make gripping easier.
• Use large bangles placing them over arms and legs as a game and pulling them off with other hand. Use hoops to step into and pull up over body.

**Difficulty finding arm and head holes**
Lay clothes flat in front of the child with arms showing. Encourage them to place their arms into the garment first so they cannot be lost, then put their head in.

**Puts clothes on back to front**
• Get the child to lay their clothing out and turn it over so it is face down before putting it on.
• Clothing with patterns or pictures on the front are easier to practice with.
• Put a mark on the inside of the hem, or on the label to remind the child which is the back.
• Look for clothes with contrasted lining, different colour lining and different textures from outside to inside.
• Get the child to check in a mirror if their clothes are on the right way round.
**DRESSING – READY, STEADY, GO!**

**Setting Goals**

- Use the dressing stages page to help the child chose dressing goals.

**Encouraging the child to Plan**

- Together identify the steps needed to begin and accomplish the task.
- Break down the activity into manageable steps.
- Write down the steps.
- Ask the child questions such as, “what do we need to do first?” “what materials do we need?” “what would happen if…?”
- Set the task out in order, for example, set clothing out on the bed in a row and prompt them to take the clothes from left to right.

**Carrying out the Task**

- Demonstrate the task first, giving simple verbal instructions.
- Grade your assistance i.e. do the first part of activity, leaving the last part or parts for the child to finish. Reduce help once each step is achieved. Working like this can help the child to feel a greater sense of achievement.
- Encourage the child to verbalise what they are doing whilst carrying out the activities.

**Checking how the child did**

- Encourage the child to check appearance in a mirror.
- Ask the child questions about things which may need fixing instead of telling them or fixing their clothing yourself. This will draw their attention to the area, encourage them to problem solve and develop more independence.

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**DRESSING SEQUENCE CHART**

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• For undressing work from the bottom (shoes) to the top of the chart (pants/knickers).
• For dressing start at the top (pants/knickers) to the bottom of the chart (shoes).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Off</th>
<th>On</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pants/Knickers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-shirt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trousers/Skirt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DRESSING RECORD CHART

Hang this chart on your bedroom wall and tick off each task as you do it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item of clothing</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>Th</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sa</th>
<th>Su</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pants</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Vest</td>
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<tr>
<td>T shirt / shirt</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fasten buttons</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trousers / skirt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fasten button and zip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jumper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>