



Liverpool
City Council

Occupational Therapy Strategies

Developing Dressing Skills – Early Years

Provided by: The Children's Occupational Therapy Service
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Name:

Getting Started

- Start dressing and undressing practice and instruction early to establish a routine.
- Allow adequate time for a child to succeed. Practice when there is no rush to get out, at weekends or evenings.
- Provide lots of praise and encouragement even for the smallest achievement
- Undressing is learned before dressing, therefore start here first.
- Always break dressing activities into small manageable steps and do each dressing task the same way each time.
- Be realistic about the kind of clothing your child can manage (especially important on gym days).
- Choose appropriate clothing. Loose fitting garments, larger buttons, Velcro fastenings, elastic waistbands etc can all help simplify the task, avoid frustration and increase independence.
- Practice with clothes that are easier to put on such as pyjamas.
- Children often enjoy dressing up in adult clothing in make believe play.
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- Make sure your child is positioned comfortably with adequate support when attempting dressing practice.
- Minimise distractions and give simple instructions. Allow them to do as much as they can before you help.
- Talk about what you are doing as you are doing it e.g. “now I’m putting your right leg in”. This provides reinforcement.
- Involve your child in the planning of the dressing sequence i.e. “Where will we start?” and “What comes next?”.
- Adapt your approach if your child is not succeeding and try to make it as much fun as possible!

Pre-dressing Activities

In order to develop skills required for dressing it may help to try some of the following activities.

Body Image

Encourage activities that will make a child aware of his own body, body parts, how they move and feel and what they are called, for example:

- Simon Says
- Dressing up games using loose and heavy clothes, shoes, hats, superhero costumes.
- Drawing around your child and getting them to fill in clothing and features.
- Action songs eg. 'if you're happy and you know it, stamp your feet', 'head, shoulders, knees and toes'.
- Pillow and balloon 'fights'.
- Games to reinforce directional skills, right and left, back and front, top and bottom eg. Twister, Simon Says etc.
- Soft play environments and ball pools.
- Dressing dolls

Range of Movement

Dressing requires a lot of body movement from reaching above our head to bending down to our toes. Activities could include:

- Helping with household chores such as stacking shelves above shoulder height and reaching down to put away toys.
- Stepping through hoops and lifting up and over head.
- Blowing bubbles for a child to pop with their hands, reaching all around their body, eg overhead, down to toes, either side and behind.
- Throwing balls overhead, between legs etc.
- Games involving the transfer of weight from side to side and forwards and backwards eg. Reaching to catch a ball or save a goal.

Developing skills for putting on socks

Practice with over-sized socks such as large walking socks.

- Dress dolls or teddies with oversized socks and gloves.
- Put glove puppets on feet.
- Remember to make sure your child is sitting in a stable position E.g. on the floor, with a back support such as the wall or in the corner of a room.

Developing skills for fastenings

Encourage activities that require fine finger movements involving a pinch grip and co-ordinating two hand together to develop the skills required to use fastenings such as buttons, zips and laces, for example:

- Pegboard pictures
- Play posting games with buttons, counters or play money. Post buttons of different sizes in a moneybox. Make slots in an egg box and use it as a scoreboard
- Parcel wrapping, wrap packages with bows, apron tying (bow at front)
- Clothes peg games e.g. can be attached to child's clothing for them to find (also reinforces body image and range of movement).
- Tearing paper e.g. collage
- Pinch pots with clay or Plasticine
- String games e.g. cat's cradle
- Bead threading, lacing cards
- Action songs e.g. 'tommy thumb'
- Screwing nuts and bolts
- Card games.
- Play games using counters, Ludo, Tiddlywinks, Snakes and Ladders. Use buttons instead of counters.
- Sort buttons or counters into categories, by colour, shape and size.
- Hide buttons in dried peas or pasta.
- Dressing dolls

Fastening Buttons

To teach the child start off the process by pushing the button part way through the button hole, the child can then complete it by pulling it through – for undoing buttons, again push the button part way and let the child pull it out. As skill improves teach the child the next stage.

Teach the rhyme: '*pinch, push, pinch, pull*'.

Practice fastening large buttons and progress to smaller ones as the child's skill increases.

Practice fastening and unfastening buttons in this way placed in front of the child on a table-top.

Sew a button on to a small bag and make a buttonhole. Place a favourite toy inside to encourage buttoning.

Planning and Sequencing

Some children may have adequate motor skills to dress themselves but are unable to organise dressing effectively. They may get their clothes on the wrong way round, in the wrong order or may not even know where to start.

Help to develop the planning and sequencing involved in dressing by trying the following:

- Breaking the task into smaller steps
- Reinforcing order by numbering clothes
- Marking clothes to indicate back or front or shoes to indicate appropriate foot
- It may help to mark the right side of the garment with coloured cotton e.g. red cotton inside right armholes of vest, shirt, jumper and inside right side of skirt or trouser waistband.
- Teach your child to look for labels on the garments which show where the top is.
- If clothes are inside out show your child the seams on the inside and ask him to rub his thumb along them.
- Layout the clothes in appropriate order, making sure they are not inside out.
- If your child has difficulty knowing which shoe goes on which foot, try drawing around the shoes place side by side on a piece of wallpaper. He can use this template to check he has his shoes on the correct feet, or try marking the insides of each shoe so that when shoes are side by side, a shape is made.
- Do each task the same way each time to reinforce sequence.
- Involve the child in the planning of what comes next and ask them questions rather than providing direct orders.
- Grade your assistance i.e. prompt child through entire process leaving last part or parts for child to complete, reducing help once each step is achieved.
- Encourage your child to check their appearance using a mirror.

Other games:

- Musical Dressing: put on clothes (as many as possible) while music playing or put on one article of clothing when music stopped.
- Matching sock game: whistle blows – child chooses correct pair of socks from pile in middle.
- Matching shoes: give one shoe – find the other from a pile of shoes.

Adapted from Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust, Occupational Therapy Department