

Promoting Independent Dressing Skills in Children

WHEN SHOULD THEY START TO HELP WITH DRESSING THEMSELVES?

Kids tend to start getting themselves dressed with help at 2 years old, and should be able to dress by themselves around 4-5 years old (Beery & Beery, 2004).

WHAT SKILLS ARE INVOLVED IN GETTING DRESSED?

- Fine motor skills
- Gross motor skills
- Motor planning
- Problem-solving
- Sequencing
- Coordination
- Visual-perceptual skills
- Body awareness
- Postural control

WHY ARE DRESSING SKILLS IMPORTANT FOR KIDS?

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- Sets the path for later independence as they grow and develop new skills
- Improves confidence in their abilities
- Promotes sense of achievement and accomplishing goals



HOW TO MAKE DRESSING ENGAGING FOR KIDS

Try to make it fun for your child by making it a game or incorporating it into play to help your child learn about clothing organization and body schema. Some examples include playing dress up with their clothes or dressing up a toy doll.

TOYS TO SUPPORT DRESSING SKILLS

- Button boards
- Popper books
- Lacing or threading boards
- Fastener books with zippers, buttons and hooks
- Dress up toys



IMPORTANT TIPS TO REMEMBER

- Allow plenty of time for your child to learn dressing techniques that are new to them
- Try to minimize distractions (noise levels, toys, other people, games, etc.) to help them focus on the task
- Dressing in front of a mirror can be of use to make sure that clothing looks correct and is in the right place before starting the day
- If your child is just starting to dress, dressing at night into pajamas may be a good time because there may be less of a hurry to get dressed
- Keep the order and sequence of how your child gets dressed consistent
- Describe what they are doing as they get dressed to facilitate understanding (ex. “put your right arm into the sleeve, and now your left arm into the other”)
- Allow your child to perform the last step of the task (ex. pulling long socks up onto ankle) to help them feel a sense of accomplishment and slowly let them do more of the task until they can do it on their own (NHS, 2025)
- Break down a dressing task into smaller steps to promote success
- Always provide encouragement and praise to support them
- Modeling dressing techniques in addition to practicing across different contexts and settings have been shown to help children learn (Laverdure & Beisbier, 2021)

POSITIONING DURING DRESSING

If your child struggles with maintaining an upright posture, having them sit on a chair or positioning them against the wall or in a corner with two sides for support will provide stability needed for dressing tasks (NHS, 2025).

WHAT TO AVOID:

- Tight clothing
- Too many layers of clothing
- Difficult fastenings

WHAT TO TRY:

- Loose clothing, such as t-shirts with large arm and neck holes
- Encourage clothing that has something on front to help them tell difference between front and back
- Jackets with contrasting coat lining to tell inside from outside
- Magnetic or Velcro fastenings for children with poor dexterity or other physical impairments (Oh, 2020)

References

Beery, K., & Beery, N. (2004). Beery VMI developmental teaching activities. Minneapolis: NCS Pearson, INC.

Laverdure, P., & Beisbier, S. (2021). Occupation-and activity-based interventions to improve performance of activities of daily living, play, and leisure for children and youth ages 5 to 21: A systematic review. The American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 75(1), 7501205050p1-7501205050p24.
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NHS. (2025). Pre-dressing skills - children's occupational therapy. Bridgewater Community Healthcare.
<https://bridgewater.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Dressing-Pre-Dressing-Skills-Childrens-Occupational-Therapy.pdf>

Oh, L. (2020, October 16). AOTA.
<https://www.aota.org/publications/student-articles/fieldwork/adaptive-fashion>

Please go to this link for an informational video about this topic: <https://youtu.be/6T0clxKJXKc>

