

Occupational Therapy Handout



Getting dressed

Encouraging your child to get dressed can sometimes feel like a struggle, but it needn't be. There are lots of simple tips and techniques you can try to help your child learn how to dress themselves.

Make sure getting dressed doesn't feel like a chore. Keep it fun and allow plenty of time so that your child is not rushed. Playing dressing up games is a good way of helping your child to learn the right skills at their own pace.

Children generally develop dressing skills in the following order:

😊 2-3 years

Most children can remove their hat, gloves and socks and can push down and pull up pants. They can remove an unbuttoned coat and undo zips and poppers at the front.

😊 3-4 years

By this age many children can put on their shoes, although often on the wrong feet! They can pull up socks and put on a coat and gloves. Many can button and unbutton large and medium-sized front buttons, pull up zips, fasten front poppers and unbuckle belts and shoes.

😊 4-5 years

Most children can now get undressed by themselves, join and fasten front zippers, buckle shoes and belts, begin to tie laces, and should be able to easily recognise the front and back of most items of clothing.

Helping your child learn to dress

There are lots of simple tips and techniques you can try to help your child learn how to dress themselves:

- 😊 Give lots of praise for practicing skills, even if they are not always successful.
- 😊 Start with undressing, this is easier and you will have more time than in the morning, although remember your child may be tired.
- 😊 Try to follow the same sequence when dressing and place clothes in an ordered pile, for example from head to toes.
- 😊 Take it one step at a time, and give help where needed with other steps. For example, your child may be able to place their shoes on their feet, but may need you to fasten the Velcro straps.
- 😊 Try not to watch all the time, children may try more when left alone.
- 😊 Rather than automatically correcting mistakes, ask your child to look (maybe in a mirror) and feel if it is correct – then encourage them to identify and sort

out what needs to be done. For example, a t-shirt needs pulling down or shoes 'feel wrong' because they are on the opposite feet.

Different approaches

There are several approaches you could try to encourage your child to dress:

1. Your child could start the task and then you help with the later stages that they cannot manage. For example, your child pulls their socks over their toes and you pull them up over the heel.
2. Your child could have the reward of finishing the task by completing the last step after you have started it. For example, you pull their socks over their toes and just over their heel, and they can pull them up their leg.

Types of clothing

You can make it easier for your child by giving them loose fitting, lightweight clothing with wide neck holes and sleeves.

Avoid lots of layers and difficult fastenings. Cuffs that are elastic, or have a button attached with elastic are good, so that they stretch open when put on.

Use elastic waistbands on trousers and clothes that fasten with zips or Velcro if buttons and buckles are difficult.