

# GETTING READY TO BE INDEPENDENT – DRESSING

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## GENERAL STRATEGIES

- Use minimal language - place your child's hand where she/he has to hold the clothing. Guide their hand, by placing yours over the top, in the direction of the movement required so you are moving the clothing, but they are feeling the movement. Gradually reduce how much your hands are guiding. Some clothes e.g. socks require that you are behind the child so they can 'feel/see' the required movement.
- One approach is to do the first steps for the child and let them finish the last step so they can experience success. As they master this, keep helping them to complete earlier steps until they can dress independently.

## VISUAL HELP

- Pictures can be helpful to show your child the steps needed for dressing.
- Clothing with labels, pictures/designs may be beneficial when helping the child to orientate their clothes i.e. the label goes at the back, the picture is on the front.
- A full-length mirror positioned in front of the child can be useful when dressing.
- Use of a timer may be helpful provide your child with some boundaries and an awareness of timing.
- Order clothes, so that they learn the correct sequence. Sometimes putting on one item before another helps e.g. putting trousers on after the T-shirt helps the T-shirt to be tucked in more easily.

## PHYSICAL HELP

- Sitting down on a small chair or on the floor will help children who do not have good balance. The child can then concentrate on dressing without worrying about wobbling or falling over. Sitting down can also help keep the child still.

## TIPS FOR SPECIFIC CLOTHING

- T-shirt - place it down with the front on the bed/floor, so that as it is picked up from the bottom it is ready to go over the head.
- Socks - loose, stretchy socks are often easier e.g. sports socks. Use socks with visual prompts e.g. different coloured heel & toe.
- Shoes – if you place the shoes together in front of your child before they start, there is a greater chance the correct one will end up on the correct foot. Teach your child to do this for him/herself.

## GETTING READY TO BE INDEPENDENT - BUTTONS

Sometimes starting with buttons is too difficult, so start with games which practice steps e.g. posting small items such as buttons, and coins into a money box or something similar, threading beads.

### **PRACTICE CAN BE MADE EASIER FOR THE CHILD IF:**

- Buttonholes are nice and big for the buttons (i.e. not too tight).
- Buttonholes are not too close together.
- The string or thread on buttons can always be lengthened to reduce the tightness.
- Make up a dress-up book or a doll with clothes with big buttons and zips to practice on.
- Toggles are good to practice on.
- Enlarge a buttonhole and replace a small button with a larger one.
- Try putting tippex (or stickers) on half of each button on some old clothes. The tippex should be on the half which will be pushed through the cloth to do an item up first. This will provide the child with visual reinforcement.
- Visual reinforcement can also be provided by sewing around a buttonhole with a very bright colour e.g. yellow, so that the child knows where the button should be aiming for.
- Play dressing up games, or have a dress up box of old clothes for the child to play with.
- Practice doing up buttons on dolls or clothes on the child's lap so they can clearly see what they are doing. Once they are able to do this move to doing up buttons on the child's own clothes.

## GETTING READY TO BE INDEPENDENT - TYING SHOE LACES

### **PRACTICAL TIPS:**

- Practice using thicker laces rather than thin laces.
- It is easier to practice laces if the shoe is on your lap initially.
- It is easier for your child to see what they are doing if they are seated with their foot (and shoe) on a small stool or chair in front of them. Face the shoe pointing away from the body so that it is in the same orientation as when on the foot.
- Shoe templates can be purchased from early learning shops and can be beneficial for practice purposes.
- While practising a visual cue can help them in working out what they need to do, e.g.:
- Tie 2 different coloured laces together at the ends, it may be easier to use one black and one white lace and then any instructions can now be given in terms of the colours.
- Thread these laces into the shoes so that you are left with a black lace one side and a white one on the other.
- If your child has difficulty knowing when to stop pulling the loops, placing a small bead or knot on each end of the lace may help in preventing them from being pulled through too far.



### **ALTERNATE METHODS:**

The “**Bunny ears**” or “**two loop**” method has fewer different steps than the standard approach, and may be easier for your child: Make a loop in each end of the lace and knot them together.

The **backward chaining method** could also be applied to laces, i.e.: child completes last step of sequence of tying laces and adds earlier steps as they learn the sequence.

### **ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES:**

Many self-tying laces and other adaptive methods are available, and may be worth considering if your child continues to experience difficulties with their laces, or at times when there is additional pressure on them e.g. at school.