

## Skills for Living

# Occupational Therapy Advice for Getting dressed / undressed



### Environment:



- Try to practice at quieter times, when there is no rush to finish the activity. E.g. practice at weekends instead of before school.
- Reduce distractions, e.g. noise, television, computers.
- Practice while sitting on a small chair, a bed or against a wall for support. These are more stable positions so the child doesn't fall over.
- Encourage the child to sit in front of a mirror whilst dressing so they can see themselves.
- Label drawers to promote independence in finding and putting away clothes.

### Doing the task:

- Start with undressing as it is much easier than dressing.
- Use big / loose clothes, starting with pyjamas
- Create a set routine for dressing so the child learns what goes first, second, third etc.
- Lay out clothes in the correct order and the right way round (i.e. a T-shirt would have its back upwards).
- Use clothes with labels, logos, socks with coloured heels or pants with pictures to help with front and back.
- Praise and reward the smallest of steps to help encourage your child.
- Create a little rhyme / routine to say out loud e.g. "One leg in the hole, two legs in the hole, stand up and pull up."; "Head goes through the hole, one arm in the sleeve - push it through, second arm in the sleeve and push it through too".
- Be patient.



## Techniques to help develop skills:

**Backward chaining:** Working *backwards* until the child can do the whole activity themselves.

- The adult starts the task for the child, and the child finishes off the very last part e.g. putting on socks – Place the sock over the child's toes and heel then get the child to pull up the sock.
- Gradually encourage the child to start earlier in the activity and do more of the task as they get better at it.



**Forward chaining:** Working *forwards* from the start of the task.

- The child does as much as they can without help. The adult then helps to finish off. Try to offer help before the child gets too frustrated.
- Praise the child for what they manage.
- Gradually encourage the child to do just a little bit more until they can manage the full task without help.



**Hand over hand:**

- Put your hands over the child's hands to help complete the task e.g. pulling up socks, fastening a zip on a coat.
- Try to encourage the child to do as much as they can themselves, but be there to assist when needed. Try not to let the child become too reliant on your help.



**Take turns:**

- You do one step of the task, then the child does the next
- You can vary who does which step from day to day so the child learns all the steps

## Visuals:



Consider the use of visual supports to help the child understand what to do and in what order to do it. E.g.:

- Checklists
- Timetables
- sequencing strips
- 'now and next'

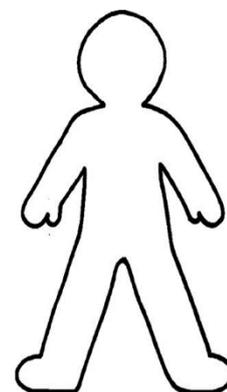
Visual supports can be photographs, pictures or symbols

### Activities to support dressing:

To be able to dress themselves, your child needs to be able to keep their body firm while using their hands (good core strength), strong hands, strong, accurate grip with their finger tips (pincer grasp) and to know how their body parts are joined and work together (body awareness).

The activities below can help a child to learn those skills:

- Play “Simon Says” Game with commands such as: put your hands behind your back, touch your heels, wiggle your toes, stand on one leg etc.
- Musical dressing-up games- Using a box of clothes, put as many on as you can before the music stops
- Draw round the child’s body then help them add detail to the body parts. They can then name / colour them.
- Sorting toys to the opposite side of the body; encourage child to cross their midline (the middle of their body).
- Passing balloons, balls, or even a rolled up pair of socks, around the body.
- Using loops of material, encourage the child to practice dressing actions, for example:
  - Can you put your foot through the loop?
  - Who can pull the loop up their body and over their head?
  - How many loops can you get around your waist?
  - Can you pull a loop up your arm?



### Resources:

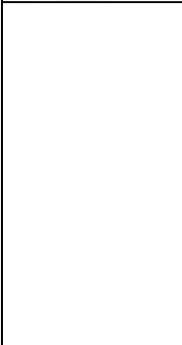
Dressing up clothes

- Choose clothes with different types of fastenings to practice
- Choose clothing of different sizes – larger garments may be easier to put on

A dressing basket  
(Montessori idea)



- Help the child select the clothes they will need for the next day / for PE in school
- Place all of the clothes in a basket / tray / box
- You may want a label on each item e.g. pants, socks etc.
- This can be used together with a picture chart to remind the child about the order to put on their clothes

<p>Stickers inside of shoes to help show which way round to put them on</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A red sticker in the right shoe (R for red / R for right)</li> <li>• Cut a larger picture sticker in half – placing one half of the sticker in each shoe. When the shoes are put together the correct way – the sticker will join correctly</li> </ul>
	<p>Dots on shoes to show which way round to put them on</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw coloured dots / smiley faces on the inside edge of each shoe. The child learns that the dots / designs need to touch together. This will then place the shoes the right way round.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use plastic drawers to prepare all the clothes needed for each day</li> <li>• Encourage the child to check everything is in the drawer – using picture cards if needed</li> <li>• Put clothes in the drawer in the order they are needed – underwear on top etc.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Sensory considerations:</b></p>
<p>Seamless clothing can be found online or in some shops.</p>
<p>Create a “wardrobe” (or a box, crate or drawer) of clothes that your child is happy to wear. When appropriate let them choose their own clothing. This will greatly increase their confidence and reduce meltdowns and upset each day.</p>
<p>Choose clothing that is well washed and softer as a result. Second hand clothing is often easier to wear than new fabrics.</p>
<p>Use fabric softener and tumble dry clothing to keep them soft and more comfortable to wear.</p>
<p>Remove labels very carefully as they can be very scratchy if raw edges are left.</p>
<p>Find out whether the child prefers long or short sleeves.</p>
<p>Don't force the child to wear clothes they dislike the feel of just because they look better – they will be much happier, and behave and learn better, in clothing they can tolerate.</p>
<p>Wear undergarments inside out to prevent scratching from seams or labels.</p>
<p>Some children can find having “Base Layers” (e.g. football skins) underneath their clothing helps because it stops outer clothing from irritating them.</p>
<p>If child or young person is sensitive to smell try washing clothes with unscented products.</p>
<p>Remember that sensory tolerances aren't the same each day. Children may feel more sensitive if things aren't going well for example.</p>

### Sensory calming techniques to support dressing:

Encourage deep pressure activities before dressing to decrease touch sensitivities. For example:

- Rub the child's body with a towel before dressing
- Massage or provide deep pressure before putting on clothes e.g. massage feet before putting on socks or rub the child's back before putting on t-shirt or vest
- Play "hot dog" or sandwich the child between pillows, or roll them up in a blanket (with their head out). Stop if the child is uneasy
- Sit in an oversized beanbag chair for snugness around the head and body; try adding a heavy blanket too
- Try rolling a gym ball or clean football up and down the length of the child's body to create deep pressure.
- Using the flats of your hands press firmly down the length of the child's body whilst they lie on their front. They may prefer it if you press through a large cushion.
- Give a "bear hug" where the child faces away from you and you wrap your arms around them and squeeze firmly
- Get the child to interlock their hands and press down on top of their head. If the child is unable to do this, but wants to try it, you can carefully do it for them. You can also place your flat hands on the child's shoulders and press firmly down

### Websites and online links for more information:

Raising a Sensory Smart Child <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Practical ideas and strategies with a focus on sensory challenges</li></ul>	<a href="http://www.sensorysmarts.com">www.sensorysmarts.com</a>
Pinterest <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An online notice board of information</li></ul>	<a href="http://www.pinterest.com">www.pinterest.com</a> Type search words e.g. "dressing skills for kids", "dressing skills and occupational therapy"

For further information:

[When Do Kids Start to Dress Themselves?](http://mamaot.com/when-do-kids-learn-to-dress-themselves-developmental-progression-of-self-dressing-skills/) | Mama OT  
<http://mamaot.com/when-do-kids-learn-to-dress-themselves-developmental-progression-of-self-dressing-skills/>

[Independence with dressing and fine motor skills](http://www.theotttoolbox.com/2016/04/independence-self-dressing-fine-motor-skills.html) | The OT Toolbox  
<http://www.theotttoolbox.com/2016/04/independence-self-dressing-fine-motor-skills.html>

[Gross Motor Skills and Independent Dressing](https://www.yourtherapysource.com/blog1/2016/04/20/gross-motor-skills-and-getting-dressed/) | Your Therapy Source  
<https://www.yourtherapysource.com/blog1/2016/04/20/gross-motor-skills-and-getting-dressed/>

[Sensory Considerations for Dressing!](http://www.yourkidsot.com/blog/sensory-considerations-for-dressing) | Your Kids OT  
<http://www.yourkidsot.com/blog/sensory-considerations-for-dressing>

["Get Dressed!" How to Modify Your Child's Dressing Routine](http://www.missjaimeot.com/get-dressed-modify-dressing/) | MissJaimeOT  
<http://www.missjaimeot.com/get-dressed-modify-dressing/>

[Teaching Kids How to Dress Themselves: Activities to extend skills](#) | The Inspired Treehouse

<http://theinspiredtreehouse.com/child-development-teaching-kids-dress/>

[Improving Following Directions with Getting Dressed](#) | Growing Hands-On Kids

<http://www.growinghandsonkids.com/improving-following-directions-getting-dressed-kids.html>

[Visual Perceptual Skills in Dressing](#) | Kids Play Space

<http://www.kidsplayspace.com.au/visual-perceptual-skills-in-dressing/>

[Work on Dressing Skills Through Play Activities](#) | Therapy Fun Zone

<https://therapyfunzone.net/blog/work-dressing-skills-play-activities/>

[Clothing:](#)

<https://www.sensorysmart.co.uk/>

<https://www.marksandspencer.com/3-pairs-of-ultimate-comfort-socks/p/clp22253633>