

## Explaining Dressing skills

Success is important; therefore begin with breaking the dressing activity into small, straightforward steps. Tackle one step at a time and give help where needed with the other steps of the task, e.g. help the child to pull the t-shirt over their head and then allow them to put their arms through the sleeves.

Dressing can be a complex activity. Children need to be able to master a number of skills. These include:

- Motor skills where a child needs to be able to move his or her limbs and body in a full range of movements requiring muscle strength and flexibility at their joints.
- Co-ordination where a child needs to be able to create co-ordinated movements, using one arm and both arms. A child also needs the control of hand movement that require fine motor skills, such as fastening buttons.
- Balance – being able to maintain their balance whilst changing posture/position both with eyes open and shut.
- Fine Motor Skills – being able to reach, grasp and release objects in order to complete tasks such as buttoning or holding the item of clothing.
- Perception – having an understanding of various sizes and shapes of buttons and also knowing the size of arm holes.
- Stereognosis – being able to feel their way without relying on sight such as finding arm holes with a jumper over his or her head or fastening buttons behind at the back.
- Body Schema – being able to tell right from left and the difference between arms and legs.

### Pre Dressing Activities :

- Dressing up in a variety of clothes and costumes and play pretend games.
- Dressing and undressing dolls and teddies.
- Musical dressing up (a variation of musical chairs). The children put items of clothing on from a pile until the music stops, at the end of the game the child with the most clothes on is the winner.
- Using a variety of large shirts or smocks, get the children to get ready for wet play, painting or cooking.
- Button boards or play cubes. These can be made to give the child practice at certain types of fastening.
- Cloth button or popper book. Parts of a picture have to be buttoned or 'popped' on.
- Matching sock game. Place a variety of socks in a pile, the child has to find pairs and put them on.
- Ensure each part or step of the task done by your child is positively reinforced.

## Learning New Skills

### Forward Chaining:

- Encourage your child to do the first step of an activity e.g. stepping into pants and then you assist them to pull them up.
- Allow them to go as far as they can, providing assistance before any frustration or distress occurs.
- Reduce the assistance gradually by increasing the steps your child does independently.
- This strategy can be used with single items or the entire process of dressing i.e. Start with pants and then provide assistance with following items of clothing

### Backward Chaining:

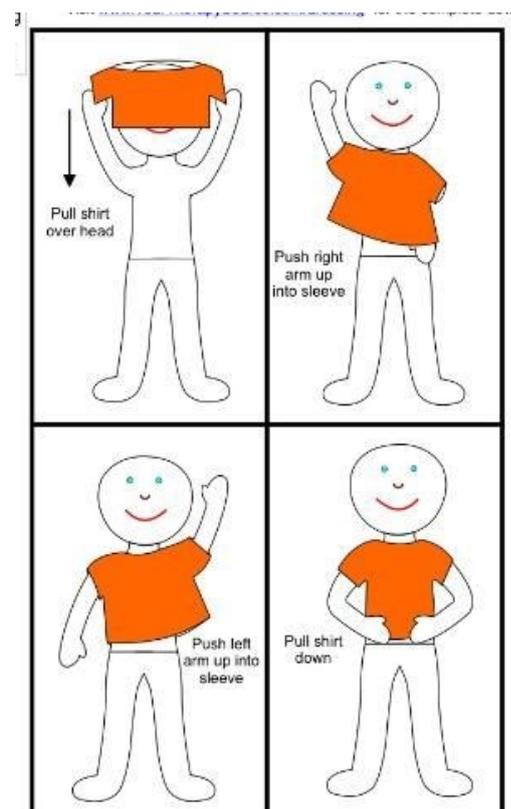
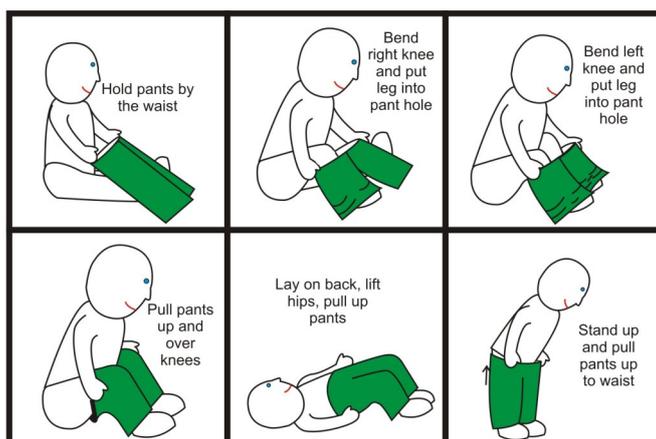
- Allow your child to do the last step of the activity i.e. you put their socks onto their toes and they then pull them up.
- Your child will gain reinforcement by the tasks completion, reducing their frustration.
- This method can be used with single items of clothing and throughout the dressing activity, you may dress the child and then encourage them to put the last item on e.g. their jumper
- Gradually reduce the steps that you complete therefore increasing their independence

### Breaking it Down:

This strategy is to break down dressing practice into 5 components. The task is then to work on one component at a time, e.g. first use games and toys that encourage your child to reach up in the air (for pushing arms through jumpers). When this is developing, use it in dressing and then move on to another skill area.

The 5 Components to consider are:

- 1- Stepping up and in (trousers, pants etc)
- 2- Arms up and through (T-shirt, coat etc)
- 3- Pulling items overhead (Pullovers)
- 4- Straightening and adjusting
- 5- Buttons, zips etc



### Buttons/Zips:

- For buttons, allow your child to do up those which they can see (e.g. at the bottom of a shirt). Start the task if necessary but then allow your child to finish it e.g. pull the button through.
- Buttons are easier to grasp if they are flat (instead of concave) large, textured or sewn slightly above the surface of the Coventry Children's and Young People's Occupational Therapy Service Dressing skills garment. Be sure buttonholes are large enough for buttoning ease.

### Laces:

- Allow time for your child to watch you tie laces. Teach them using the backwards chaining, forwards chaining or breaking it down strategies.
- Toggles are a useful alternative to laces, as are Velcro fastening shoes.
- Using different coloured laces can help with learning to tie them as they give an added visual cue.

### Socks:

- Place socks partly over your child's foot, then encourage them to perform the last part.
- Sport tubular socks are easier than those with a heel.
- Socks with coloured heels and toes also make it easier to work out the correct orientation.
- Make sure that the elastic is not too tight.
- Prompt your child to use their "magic thumbs" to help pull the socks on. I.e. isolating their thumbs to get them under the socks to pull up

### Positioning:

- Be sure your child is sitting or standing comfortably with support as needed on a chair, the floor, a bed, or against a wall.
- Some children may sit better in a corner where both walls give added support.
- Sit next to, in front of, or directly behind the child during activity. Guide the child through the task. For some children, it may help to sit in front of a mirror.