

Advice for schools on helping children to get dressed and undressed

Dressing is an activity that can be taken for granted as it is one of the earliest activities related to independence in self care that we develop in childhood. Aspects of learning how to dress it utilises many different skills, for example, balance; dexterity, planning and sequencing movement, action and spatial organisation to environment and the task at hand. More complicated aspects of learning to dress can be challenging such, as learning to tie shoe laces, do buttons and getting clothes the correct way around are often aspects of dressing that can take a considerable time to master, sometimes long after a child has been able to complete other aspects of dressing independently. These are often tackled at a later date as individual activities.

Getting started

To support a child in learning to get dressed you will need to:

- Allow extra time
- Ensure appropriate space
- Limit distractions
- Provide 1:1 support (at least in the beginning stages)
- Let the child know what it is you expect them to do.
- Keep instructions brief and understandable.
- Lay clothes out for the child in the order they are intended to be put on, facing down with the bottom opening closest to the child making sure that all buttons are opened beforehand.
- Be patient

Developing pre dressing skills

To increase the child's awareness of their own body and allow them to follow your instructions for what you wish them to do, encourage the naming of body parts. Use songs, rhymes, games, books, jigsaws and pictures to assist.

Start to learn the names of garments and their relationships to body parts. You can use a running commentary as you help the child to dress e.g. Here are your trousers, what goes down the trouser leg? What do we start with? Show me your foot."

Sitting can be more effective than standing as it requires less balance skills to achieve. If more support is required a small chair with a back can be useful as can resting with the child's back against the wall or settee.

Sequencing skills

- Ask the child to tell you what order they will put the clothes on before they start.
- Use pictures, visual charts and picture check lists to assist.
- Keep the order of dressing/undressing the same each time to make the activity predictable.
- Start by expecting them to remember the first item only and build this up to two items once the child is consistent at remembering one.

Getting clothing the right way around

- Begin with looser rather than tighter garments and short sleeved as opposed to long sleeved garments.
- Lay the jumper, vest etc. out with the bottom edge nearest the child and the neck edge furthest away with the front of the garment face down.
- Highlight tags if they are not an irritant to draw attention to the back and top of the garment so that the child can orientate the garment when putting it on.

THE ADAPTIVE METHOD OF: backwards chaining

The overall priority is for children to complete the task by completing the last stage of each clothing task working towards completing all aspects. The child therefore gets the praise and sense of achievement of having completed the last part of the task

The first stage

Encourage the child to hold his or her arms and legs in the correct position for the removal and putting on of outer garments such as jumpers and trousers.

The next stages

Undressing is easier than dressing so start by encouraging the child to undress themselves.

UNDRESSING

Removal of trousers (and other items of clothing including leggings, shorts, easy fitting trousers, tracksuit bottoms etc)



Pull the child's trousers down to the ankles and remove one foot, child has to remove the other foot.



Once the child can remove their second foot from their trousers automatically, leave their remaining leg in, giving them verbal instructions to remove this leg. The child should then hopefully automatically remove both legs in turn.



Next stage is to prompt the child to pull the trousers down from their knees to their ankles.



Then from the top of their thighs to knee level



Then remove their pants from fully pulled up over bottom, down and off.

If this is difficult try breaking the steps into smaller stages e.g. you pull to half way down the buttocks.

Removing T-shirt (one arm at a time)

1. Child has T-shirt on
2. Helper pulls T-shirt up from the bottom and removes both arms but leaves head in, child's part is to pull over the head, therefore completing the task and receiving the praise.
3. Once the child can do this leave one arm in so the child has to remove arm and head from T-shirt to complete the task
4. Then leave both arms in and pull T-shirt up to arm pits or hold it up and ready for the child to start.
5. Last stage is for the child to remove the T-shirt on request

Removing shirt (same principle used for front buttoning dress, cardigan, jacket etc)

1. Child not expected to do buttons
2. Remove shirt except for one arm half in (e.g. the forearm) and child removes the shirt from their arm with instruction.
3. Next leave the arm fully in the sleeve and the child removes this.
4. Then have one arm fully in and the other arm half in (wrist and hand still in)
5. Then you should unbutton and pull off shirt from shoulders only and allow the child to remove the rest of the garment.
6. Child may then be able to remove shirt if fasteners are done for them.

Socks



Position:

With the child in a seated position with their back supported against a wall or settee, they can sit with one leg crossed up onto the opposite thigh for the foot that is going to be dressed/undressed.



As this is achieved allow the child to pull off his or her own socks. You may find it easier to start by pulling the leg portion of the sock down past the ankle. Continue moving the sock down until the point at which your child can remove the sock themselves.



Show the child how to put their socks on starting by pulling the sock onto the foot and just past the ankle and allowing the child to pull the sock up the leg to complete the task. Gradually move the sock starting position farther down

the foot until the child can manage the task on their own.

Trousers (Start with elasticated waists)



Position:

Start this task in a seated position with the back supported. As trousers are put onto legs either by adults or by the child and pulled past the knees, the child should be encouraged to move onto their knees and then into standing which may require holding onto a piece of furniture or adult to assist getting up.



Start by pulling the trousers past the knee, getting the child into standing where they will be required to pull up from there to complete the task.



Progress this task by moving the point at which the child takes control of the task to an earlier point in time by starting their intervention with the trousers placed back towards the ankles and complete by showing the child how to place feet into the individual leg holes.

Taking off and putting on a coat:



Most children in a foundation stage will be able to remove their coats. A large number will be able to put their coats on. Many will be unable to fasten them up.

- Initially treat finding the coat peg as a separate task.
- Allow extra time and the opportunity to practice when the cloakroom is not full of other children
- Encourage asking for help
- Use sequencing cards to combine the taking off of a coat with putting it on a coat peg.
- Use sequencing cards to combine removing a coat from the coat peg and putting it on
- Practice putting a coat on.
- Use backward chaining – as described above.
- Use the hood as a locator
- Bring the child's attention to the weather outside or a weather board inside to associate the weather with clothing need.
- Have parents/carers on board and agree on a consistent approach within setting and at home.

