

# Dressing: Zip it, Tie it Down and Button Up!

Dressing is an important skill children need to learn in order to develop their independence. For many children and their parents, learning this skill can be a long and frustrating process! To make it a smooth process for all, it helps to practice the regularly and approached it with much patience and encouragement.

As in any new task, your child is guaranteed to make mistakes and get frustrated, but the following tips will help to make this process easier for both you and your child:

## **General Tips and Tricks**

- Try to practice dressing at the same time each day, ideally when the child is at their best.
- Be patient and try to leave extra time so your child does not feel rushed-to start with do it on days there's no hurry to get to child care or kindy.
- If possible, practice dressing in the same location and try to minimise distractions and interruptions.
- Teach undressing first as this is an easier skill to learn than dressing.
- Lay out the clothes so they are ready for you child to put on.
- Begin with clothing where the front and back are obvious (e.g. clear labels, bright, coloured openings of socks).
- Loose fitting clothes are easier to manage than tight fitting clothing. Try tighter fitting clothing once your child is confident putting on loose fitting clothing.
- Begin with shorts and short sleeve shirts as these are easier to manage

than pants and long sleeve shirts.

- Interest your child in the easier jobs while you do the hard ones.
- When your child gets tangled up or confused, don't take over; simply straighten their clothes out so that they can continue to try to themselves.
- Be as consistent as you can with the dressing task. For example, encourage your child to start with the same side of the body each time.
- Give your child some extra hands-on experience! In addition to letting your child try to do the real thing, look for specially designed dolls or fabric books that allow little hands to practice zipping, buttoning, snapping, and tying.
- Use prompt sheets with pictures or words to help your child remember the sequence of the task.
- Encourage young children or those with poor core strength to sit down when dressing.
- Focus on "tags go at the back" to help orientation. If there is no tag in the usual location use a prominent texta (e.g. gold or black) to draw a \* where the back of the item is and where a tag might ordinarily be placed.

## **Teach it backwards**

As crazy as it sounds, it is often helpful to teach the last part of the task first. Just like when a child first learns to make a sandwich, it is likely that the adult butters the bread and creates the filling *and then* the child puts the last piece of bread on top, so too the same can be done with dressing.

In the case of dressing though, learn the steps in reverse one at time by first breaking it down into steps. For example, the steps for putting on pants would be:

1. Pick up pants by waistband
2. Lower pants and lift up leg
3. Put left leg into pant hole
4. Put right leg into pant hole
5. Pull pants up to knees
6. Stand and pull pants to waist

Once the dressing task has been broken down into steps you can start teaching your child the last step first. For putting pants on you would do steps one to five

for your child and encourage them to do step six. Once they have mastered this step you can begin to teach step 5.

Remember always finish on success and praise your child's efforts!

We would love to hear how you go with our suggestions. Good luck!

For more information on how you can help your child, book an appointment with our friendly Speech Therapists and Occupational Therapists on [1800 KIDSENSE](http://1800KIDSENSE.com.au).

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

