

## DRESSING SKILLS

### General Considerations:

- Have the child complete dressing tasks while in a supported seated position. This may be best with the child's back against the wall for support if the child is seated on the floor.
- Encourage independence for dressing when you have time available to wait for child's response and to encourage your child to complete independently. When you are rushed, this may be very frustrating. However, it is important to allow practice during the child's daily routines and often so they can gain independence.
- Minimize distractions while the child is practicing dressing skills.
- Encourage children to assist with dressing tasks by 12 months of age by helping to pull their arm out of their coat, pushing their foot into their shoes, etc.
- Undressing skills typically precede dressing skills such as pulling off a hat.

### Encourage Dressing Readiness:

- Talking about the parts of the body and naming clothing
- Assist in developing awareness of the self in space
- Assist in developing understanding of "in, out, up, down, push, pull"
- Assist with positioning so child can assist with dressing tasks
- Develop grasps (i.e., to use pincer for fasteners, strength in grasp to pull up pants)

### Development of Dressing / Undressing Skills:

#### Stage #1

- Child co-operates in dressing, holds foot or arm out or pushes arm or leg through sleeves or pant leg; pulls off hats, mittens, socks, shoes.

#### Stage #2

- Child learns to undress first; removes unfastened coat; helps push down; garment/removes pull-down pants with elastic waist; finds armholes in sleeves; puts on front-button coat, shirt, etc.; unbuttons 1 large button.

#### Stage #3

- Child tries to put on socks; puts on t-shirt with some assistance; places shoes on feet (may be wrong feet); independent with pull down garment; zip/unzip jacket with assistance; needs assist to remove t-shirt; begin to develop management of fasteners.

## Clothing/Dressing Suggestions:

- Begin with loose fitting, oversized, and comfortable clothing.
- Clothes without fasteners are easiest (i.e., t-shirts and elasticized waists).
- Tubular socks with no heel are easier to put on and seamless socks or socks turned inside out will prevent marks and be more comfortable.
- Mittens are easier to put on than gloves.
- Add key chains/rings or braided yarn to zipper to make it easier to pull up and down independently.
- Begin with large buttons or sew buttons permanently and place Velcro to fasten.
- Elastic shoelaces can facilitate shoe tying.
- Encourage parents to select clothing with a minimum of frustration -minimal number of fasteners, large buttons and buttonholes, large tabs on zippers/zipper pulls, loose fitting clothing with large neck and armholes.
- If the coat has a hood, have the child put the hood on their head first, then the coat will hang in a way that makes it easier to place arms in the sleeves.
- Add visual cues: e.g., put arrows in shoes- when shoes are placed side by side, arrows should point to one another; add mark in the back of a jacket or sweater that does not have a label.
- Coat Flip: The "coat flip trick" is a playful and effective method to help toddlers learn to put on their coats independently. In this approach, the coat is laid flat on the floor with the hood facing the child's feet. The child then slides their arms into the sleeves while the coat is still on the floor. Once their arms are in, they can pull the coat over their head and flip it into place, with the hood now at the top.



Image from: <https://www.thekavanaughreport.com/2016/02/the-montessori-coat-flip.html>

## Teaching Dressing:

### 1. Clothing Order:

- Lay out clothing in the order you to put them on or ask your child what comes first to see if he/she knows and then teach if they do not know. Lay them out in the same way each time.
- Use visual cues for clothing order and show your child how to use the pictures/cues to select correct clothing.
- Get your child to pick up the next item they need and let your child know if the wrong ones were chosen.
- Provide lots of praise for correct choices.

### 2. Clothing Orientation:

Once your child knows what order to put the clothing on, work with them to orient the clothing properly. For example:

- Ask your child to hold up the item as though they were going to put it on and verbally correct or show why or why not it is in the correct direction (i.e., underwear have front pocket/flap, tag/print on back of underwear).
- You could also mark clothing if you need to. For example, add a permanent marker dot in the middle/back of pants or show the tag so they know that it is the back of the pants.
- Once your child has the pants on have them pull out the waist to see of the visual cue is there, if it is, have your child remove the pants to put them on with the correct orientation.
- For underwear, it would be the flap in the front (for boys) and the shirt would also need a marker for the back of the shirt (if there is no tag). Socks with a different coloured heel could be used to help orient socks.

### 3. Dressing with Backward Chaining:

Use backward chaining to encourage your child to gradually complete more and more steps of the dressing tasks until they can do it independently. For example:

- Hold up a shirt and show your child the back. Use hand-over-hand assistance or demonstrate how to gather the side in preparation to put it over their head.
- Put the shirt over their head/resting on shoulders and help guide one hand, but then stop and encourage them to put the other arm in independently.
- Once your child is able to do this consistently, put the shirt over their head, then wait and encourage them to put in both arms.
- Once they have this skill, have them put the shirt (with the edges gathered by you) over their head.

- Finally, have them hold and gather the material on both sides of the shirt (they may need hand-over-hand assistance to do this step at first) then encourage them to put it over their head, etc. until they are completing the task independently.
4. Your child may need extra encouragement, extra time (waiting for their response), and/or hand-over-hand assistance at first, until they understand that they are responsible for dressing independently, because up until now they may be used to someone else doing all the work. Your child may need a lot of repetition to become independent with this task. Don't give up!
  5. Next steps:  
Once your child becomes more independent with putting on the clothes that are laid out for them, you may want to have them work on where to put clothes when undressing, selecting what clothing to wear, where to find these items, and the difference between clean and dirty clothes.

### Other Tips & Tricks

- See the Fasteners (Buttons and Zipper) handout for more information regarding these skills.