

the school years toolkit

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Tying shoelaces

You have been directed to this Advice Sheet for guidance on helping children develop skills with tying their shoelaces.

If you have used this Advice Sheet and have not seen improvement after three months, please contact CYPIT.

Why do some children find this difficult?

A child may have difficulty doing up shoelaces for a variety of reasons such as poor bilateral coordination, postural instability, poor fine motor manipulation, reduced muscle tone or visual perceptual difficulties.

What you might see

- The child may be reluctant to try shoelaces.
- The child often walks around with laces undone and trailing.
- The child may seek help and reassurance.
- Shoelaces tied in a knot and the child attempting to slip their foot in without undoing it.

Strategies and Advice

- Teach the child using the “Backward Chaining” technique. This means that you first break the activity down into steps. You carry out most of the steps but leave the last step for the child. When the child has mastered that step, you allow them to do the last two steps and so on until they can complete the whole task. This way they will always be the person to finish the task.
- Replace thin shoelaces with something easier to grip. Soft, wide (but not too fat) laces are ideal. Avoid round laces as they tend to come undone.
- Thick shoelaces also provide extra friction in the eyelets, which helps keep the starting knot tight while working on the tricky finishing bow.
- Replace slippery synthetic shoelaces with ones made of cotton, or other natural fibres, as these provide better grip and also help keep the starting knot tight.
- Use a double starting knot, which keeps things even tighter.
- Sit comfortably and practice with a shoelace wrapped around the thigh instead of awkwardly reaching down to tie your shoes. Alternatively use your shoe but with it placed on a table surface instead of your foot.
- Join two different coloured shoelaces together, or dye one half of a shoelace, so that the shoe can be laced with a different colour on each side making it easier to follow coloured diagrams or verbal instructions.

Section 5 **advice** sheets

- Knot the very ends of each shoelace to stop the ends being accidentally pulled through the knot (when tightening) or out of the eyelets (when loosening).
- Practise tying knots and bows on other things, for example on presents or aprons.

Suggested Resources

Early Learning Centre -Plastic shoe with lace attached for practice.

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