

# the school years toolkit

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## Dressing skills

### Why do some children find dressing difficult?

Some children find dressing difficult due to movement or learning difficulties.

All children learn to undress first. You can help your child by breaking the task down into little steps and getting them to assist you at first. Then, as their ability grows, you can let them carry out that stage of dressing for themselves.

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

### What you may see

- The child being reluctant to take part in dressing themselves.
- The child seeking help and reassurance.
- Clothes put on backwards or inside out.
- Clothes left twisted on the body.
- Some items of clothing left off because it was missed during the sequence.
- Frustration due to their inability to dress independently.
- Sensitivity to clothing, eg labels, seams, new clothing.

### Strategies and Advice

For sensitivity to clothing please refer to the Sensory Processing Advice Sheet.

- Choose loose fitting clothes with minimum fastenings. Look for tops with easy openings, stretchy socks and elasticated waists.
- Start by encouraging your child to assist in the process of undressing / dressing, for example by waiting for your child to push their arm through a sleeve.
- Make sure your child is well supported in sitting or standing so that their hands are free to use. If they have poor balance, get them to sit on a chair or use a corner wall for support.
- Start by teaching your child to undress as this is easier than dressing.
- Talk your child through the order in which clothes are put on, that is which ones are put on first. Draw attention to different parts of the body and name them to help improve their body awareness.
- Establish a routine to avoid confusion, so that the activity becomes predictable. Keep the sequence of dressing / undressing the same.

## Section 5 **advice** sheets

- Try to practise when you are not rushed. Allow time for your child to cooperate in the process eg pause when their arm is placed in the sleeve hole so that they can push their arm through independently.
- Practise dressing in the evening or at weekends when there is time.
- Lay the clothes out in the order they are put on. Lay jumpers out with the bottom edge nearest the child and the neck furthest away.
- When you are assisting the child to dress, give simple verbal and gestural instructions e.g. "give me your foot".
- Practise dressing/undressing during doll play or in dressing up games.
- Dress in front of a mirror for added reinforcement.
- Provide a visual timetable/schedule. This can help the child by giving a pictorial sequence of the stages involved.
- Remember to reinforce their effort and give positive feedback.
- Set small achievable goals eg pulling up trousers.
- For children who find dressing very challenging use 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 will ensure that your child finishes the task every time. For example you may start your child off with the last stage of the task, which is to pull the button through the button hole.
- For children who are easily distracted ensure a quiet distraction free environment.

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## Suggested Resources

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Ball, F. (2002) Hints and tips for activities of daily living. London, Jessica Kingsley.

Klein, M.D. (1995) Pre-dressing skills. Tuscan A.Z, Therapy Skill Builders.

Symbols from Somerset Total Communication

Websites for visual symbols:

[www.do2learn.com](http://www.do2learn.com)

[www.ispeek.co.uk](http://www.ispeek.co.uk)