

the school years toolkit

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Fasteners

You have been directed to this Advice Sheet because the child is having difficulty with buttons, zips and other fastenings.

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

Why do some children find this difficult?

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

Strategies and Advice

Buttons

- Start by using large buttons on a doll, a jumper worn by someone else or a toy.
- 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 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.
- Once the child has mastered large buttons, move on to fastening items with smaller buttons.
- Reattach the buttons with a thick thread, leaving about half an inch of thread between the button and the fabric for easier buttoning.
- Make a “Button Box” for a fun and interesting toy. Use a shoe box and make slots on the top (horizontal and vertical). Let the child post buttons or coins through the holes.
- Make a “Button Board” out of fabric and large buttons. Make the button holes at least a quarter of an inch larger than the button. Sew the button on loosely with strong thread. Place an attractive picture on the button board under the fabric so that after the button is unfastened, it reveals the picture.
- Use threading cards/games/activities. The same skills and principles in threading are used when fastening buttons.

Section 5 **advice** sheets

- When teaching the child to fasten shirt buttons, remember to start buttoning from the bottom to the top to ensure the button and button hole correspond correctly.
- Encourage the child to check him or herself in the mirror.
- Top buttons are often very difficult and can be replaced with Velcro or a popper (sew the button on permanently on the outside). Alternatively, all buttons, including sleeve buttons, can be replaced with Velcro fastenings or poppers.

Zips

- Demonstrate how to fasten and unzip a zip by pulling on the tab. Allow your child to assist you by pulling the zip up or down with you.
- Zip tags can be adapted by attaching a piece of ribbon, a zip ring or a large paper clip. This makes it easier to grasp.
- Start with heavy-duty large zips which have big tabs or rings as these slide more easily.
- Practise unzipping a purse or pocket to reveal a surprise!
- Velcro tabs can replace zips to encourage independence.