

Trafford Children's Therapy Service

EARLY YEARS – LEARNING TO DRESS

DRESSING ADVICE

Remember to be realistic, about dressing skills. A four year old is generally, not ready to fasten small top shirt buttons, or tie laces. Many children have difficulties with dressing independently. If there are no obvious physical reasons, try the following ideas.

Difficulty with taking off or putting on a garment e.g. vest

When helping your child try not to talk too much about what you are both doing. We appreciate that language and communication is important, but in trying to explain or instruct your child to do something they may be getting more confused.

If your child gets confused by verbal instructions try the following:

- a) Rather than asking the child to “put your hand here” or “push down there”, just quietly place your child’s hand where she/he has to hold the clothing.
- b) Rather than telling them to “pull up” or “push down”, quietly guide their hand, by placing yours over the top, in the direction of the movement required. So in effect you are pulling the vest off over their head, but they are doing the necessary movements.
- c) As they get the idea of what movement is required, gradually reduce how much your hands are guiding.

Some clothes e.g. socks, require that you may have to stand/sit behind the child in order that the movement they ‘feel/see’ is the required one. Once they have got the idea then positioning yourself in front is the next step.

Backward Chaining

This is another approach to teaching a child to dress or undress, in which the dressing/undressing sequence, is taught starting with the last stage and moving towards the first. An example of using the backward chaining technique is explained below in terms of removing a T-shirt and trousers, however it can be used when teaching how to remove/replace any item of clothing.

Removing a T-shirt:

1. First encourage the child to remove the T-shirt from over their head.
2. When they have fully mastered this (this may take days or weeks), move on to having them remove the T-shirt from their neck and shoulders.
3. When they are good at this, they then learn to remove it with one arm in and one out of the T-shirt.

4. Then they learn to take it off when both arms are in the sleeves.

Removing trousers:

1. Encourage the child to remove the trousers when one leg is removed.
2. Then they learn to take off when the trousers are pulled down to the ankles
3. The next stage is the child starts taking them off when pulled down to the knees.
4. Then they remove them when pulled down to the thighs.
5. Then they learn to take them off when pulled halfway down the buttocks.
6. The next stage involves undoing the fastening, and then removing the trousers independently.



Orientation of Clothing

Clothing with labels, pictures/designs help the child to orientate their clothes i.e. the label at the back, the picture is on the front. Choose clothes, e.g. pants and t-shirts that have pictures on the front.

Shoes on the right feet: If you place the shoes together in front of your child before they start, there is a greater chance the correct one will end up on the correct foot. Teach your child to do this for themselves.

Mark the inside of the shoes with a red dot, the same side as the big toe. Child lines up the dots so shoes are correctly aligned, child places feet into shoes.

Organising the Clothing

Encourage your child to choose their clothes to put on.

Try to help them order their clothes on a chair or bed/floor, so that they learn the correct sequence.

Vest/T-shirt: Place the T-shirt face down on the bed/floor, so that as it is picked up it is ready to go over the head.

Socks: Loose, stretchy types are easier. Socks with colour or pattern can help to get the socks in the right position.

Time Factor

It is worth thinking about the most appropriate time to help and encourage your child to dress themselves.

Most families don't have a lot of time to practice dressing in the mornings, so alternative times are:

- Bedtime – getting undressed for bath and putting on pyjamas is usually a more relaxed time.
- Changing clothes to go out
- Swimming or dressing for sports
- Evenings, weekends and holidays are likely to be the best times, when the pressure is less
- Dressing-up games, using dressing up clothes is a fun way to learn to dress and undress

Motivation and Behaviour:

Sometimes when a child feels under pressure to achieve something, they may lose motivation or have difficulty learning the task due to anxiety. Success at dressing can really build a child's self-confidence and sense of independence and maturity.

Remember to: -

- Be realistic, children develop dressing skills at different ages
- Praise your child however small the achievement
- Don't get too stressed about your child's difficulties.
- Try to make dressing fun
- Use a reward e.g. gives a sticker for 'good dressing'.
- Talk about how clever they have been to important people in their lives
- Look at story books about dressing
- Dress dolls and toys



Environment

Consider your child gets dressed, obviously a warm room is pleasant, but consider also distractions within the room i.e. TV. A quiet environment will probably be better to help them to stay focused on the task.

Sitting down on a small chair, stool or on the floor will make dressing easier. The child can then concentrate on dressing without worrying about wobbling or falling over.

A large full-length mirror positioned directly in front of the child can be helpful when dressing.