

Supporting dressing skills

Dressing requires many skills

Dressing is a complex activity which requires many skills.

These include:

- Gross motor skills, balance, coordination, strength, flexibility and postural control
- Body awareness, crossing the midline of the body and coordinating both sides of the body
- Fine motor skills including pincer grasp, hand strength and grasp and release
- Knowing right from left
- Hand-eye coordination
- Visual perception to identify positioning of clothing
- Motor planning



Tips for practising dressing

- Undressing is easier than dressing – practice these skills first
- Sit to dress the lower body while standing balance is still developing
- Ensure all adults helping are teaching a consistent approach for each garment e.g., put t-shirt over the head first, and then arms through the sleeves
- Start with loose-fitting, stretchy clothing, elastic waists and avoid complicated fastenings until confidence grows
- Shorts and short-sleeve shirts are easier to manage
- Dress in front of a mirror to provide visual cues
- Tackle one step at a time and encourage the child to do more steps over time. Offer help before the child gets too frustrated
- Reduce distractions
- Lay out clothes in the correct order and the right way around
- Choose clothing with pictures on the front to make it easier to distinguish front from back
- Try to practice at quieter times when you're not in a rush
- Label drawers with visuals to encourage independence in choosing and putting away clothes
- Consider visual sequences if needed to help remember the order to dress, and always use the same order



Dressing skill milestones

12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cooperates during dressing• Helps by holding out arm for sleeve or foot for shoe• May pull shoes off
18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Takes off shoes and socks• Takes off hat and may put back on
2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finds arm holes in shirt• Puts on hat• Puts on simple slip on shoes (may be wrong feet)• Takes off an unzipped jacket
2.5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Takes off loose pants• Tries to put on socks
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Puts on shoes and fastens velcro (may be wrong feet)• Can pull zips up and down once the shank is in place• Unbuttons large buttons
4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can put t-shirt on and off independently (may get back to front)• Pulls up and down underwear and pants independently• Fastens large buttons• Puts on socks and shoes (doesn't tie laces)
5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can dress and undress mostly independently• May need help with small buttons, zips and laces• Less likely to get things back to front



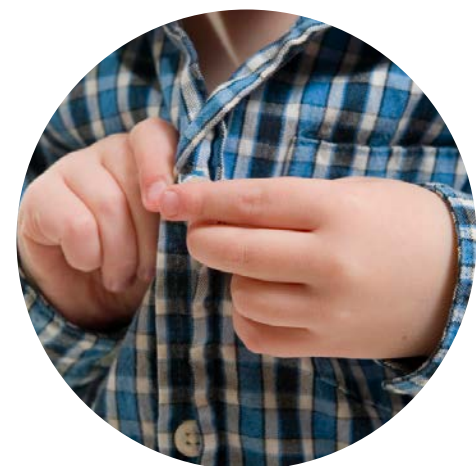
Activities and games to work on dressing skills

- Playing games like Simon Says, Hokey Pokey, Twister, and musical dress-ups (put on as many items of clothing as you can before the music stops)
- Dressing up as favourite characters
- Obstacle courses including dressing skills e.g. pull a loop made of clothing elastic over the head, down the body and off the feet, then reverse. Use smaller loops to practice the skills needed to put on socks and sleeves.
- Practice dressing dolls and teddies
- Dressing skills toys such as <https://www.edresources.com.au/melissa-doug-teddy-wear>
- Threading and lacing activities
- Posting coins into a money box to build pre-buttoning skills
- Paper/felt people to practice choosing outfits, for example to match the weather

Sensory considerations

Many children have sensory sensitivities to certain clothing which can impact their willingness to dress.

- Seamless clothing can be purchased
- Identify preferred items and purchase in multiple colours or patterns
- Well wash clothing before use
- Second hand clothing is often easier to tolerate than new
- Remove labels carefully to avoid leaving sharp edges
- Consider a base layer such as "skins" or Jetproof sensory clothing
- Use unscented washing products if smells are challenging
- Use deep pressure before dressing



Believe and Become, through the REACH UP initiative, is proudly delivering projects for the Peer Support and Capacity Building (PSCB) grant for the NDIS, including this free resource.