

Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust

# **Dressing Skills**

# **DESCRIPTION**

Dressing and undressing skills are very much a part of everyday life for all of us. The act of dressing and undressing oneself completely independently can be a complicated and difficult process.

## **PRE-REQUISITE for dressing are:**

- Motor Skills e.g. Balance, co-ordinating movements and fine motor skills.
- Sensory Skills e.g. Track objects with eyes, discriminate differences in size and shape, handle different textures and identify objects by touch only.
- **Body Scheme** e.g. knowing where each body part relates in space, knowing that the body has two sides and a midline.

# **HELPFUL HINTS**

- Dress in front of a mirror to provide visual cues and use the mirror to check all is correct before going out.
- Start with undressing. Undressing before bed and helping to put on pyjamas is a good time to start as you have more time at night than in the morning.



- Practice dressing and undressing during the weekend, this may reduce the impact of time pressures which impact on ability during the school week.
- Establish a routine to help to prevent confusion.
- Break each step of the activity into small stages and talk out loud through them. For instance when putting on a jumper make sure that the arms are out, that it's the right way around before putting it over the head.
- Allow extra time for your child to practice these new skills. These strategies may be more time consuming and you may therefore only have time to practise them 3-4 times a week to begin with. When practicing you should be as free from distraction as possible.
- Consider the texture of different clothing. Some children may need clothing labels to be removed, or may be uncomfortable in certain fabrics.



# **ACTIVITY IDEAS**

## **Pre-dressing Activities:**

- Dressing up in a variety of clothes and costumes and play pretend games.
- Dressing and undressing dolls and teddies.
- Musical dressing up (a variation of musical chairs). The children put items of clothing on from a pile until the music stops, at the end of the game the child with the most clothes on is the winner.
- Using a variety of large shirts or smocks, get the children to get ready for wet play, painting or cooking.
- Button boards or play cubes. These can be made to give the child practice at certain types of fastening.
- Cloth button or popper book. Parts of a picture have to be buttoned or 'popped' on.
- Matching sock game. Place a variety of socks in a pile, the child has to find pairs and put them on.
- Wooden shoe a shoe shaped piece of card with holes in can be used to practise lacing and tying shoes.
- Bow book. A fabric book with different types of materials to make a bow, eg ribbon, laces, apron strings, etc.
- Package wrapping. Making parcels and tying them up with different sorts of ties.
- Lacing pictures. Picture boards with holes in to lace threads through.
- Dressing cards, which require the child to identify the order that clothes are put on.

# **Orientation:**

- Encourage body awareness by naming parts of the body and then the piece of clothing that covers it.
- Help lay out clothes in the order that they are going to be put on. Place the end which is going to be put on first, nearest to your child.

- Use cues such as labels to identify the front from the back of clothes.
- Buy underpants with pictures on the front to give a visual cue for dressing and socks with coloured heels and toes.
- Label shoes right and left if necessary.

## **Positioning:**

- Be sure your child is sitting or standing comfortably with support as needed on a chair, the floor, a bed, or against a wall.
- Some children may sit better in a corner where both walls give added support.
- Sit next to, in front of, or directly behind the child during activity. Guide the child through the task. For some children, it may help to sit in front of a mirror.

# **LEARNING NEW SKILLS**

# **Forward Chaining:**

- Encourage your child to do the first step of an activity e.g. stepping into pants and then you assist them to pull them up.
- Allow them to go as far as they can, providing assistance before any frustration or distress occurs.
- Reduce the assistance gradually by increasing the steps your child does independently.
- This strategy can be used with single items or the entire process of dressing i.e. Start with pants and then provide assistance with following items of clothing.
- Ensure each part or step of the task done by your child is positively reinforced.

## **Backward Chaining:**

- Allow your child to do the last step of the activity i.e. you put their socks onto their toes and they then pull them up.
- Your child will gain reinforcement by the tasks completion, reducing their frustration.

- This method can be used with single items of clothing and throughout the dressing activity.
- You may dress the child and then encourage them to put the last item on e.g. their jumper.
- Gradually reduce the steps that you complete therefore increasing their independence.

#### **Breaking it Down:**

This strategy is to break down dressing practice into 5 components. The task is then to work on one component at a time, e.g. first use games and toys that encourage your child to reach up in the air (for pushing arms through jumpers).

When this is developing, use it in dressing and then move on to another skill area.

The 5 Components to consider are:

- 1 Stepping up and in (trousers, pants etc)
- 2 Arms up and through (T-shirt, coat etc)
- 3 Pulling items overhead (Pullovers)
- 4 Straightening and adjusting5 Buttons,

zips etc.

# **KEY DRESSING AREAS**

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## **Buttons/Zips:**

- For buttons, allow your child to do up those which they can see (e.g. at the bottom of a shirt). Start the task if necessary but then allow your child to finish it e.g. pull the button through.
- Buttons are easier to grasp if they are flat (instead of concave) large, textured or sewn slightly above the surface of the garment. Be sure buttonholes are large enough for buttoning ease.
- A safety pin or key ring attached to a zip may make it easier to grasp.

#### Laces:

- Allow time for your child to watch you tie laces. Teach them using the backwards chaining, forwards chaining or breaking it down strategies.
- Toggles are a useful alternative to laces, as are Velcro fastening shoes.
- Using different coloured laces can be help with learning to tie them as they give an added visual cue.

#### Socks:

- Place socks partly over your child's foot, then encourage them to perform the last part.
- Sport tubular socks are easier than those with a heel.
- Socks with coloured heels and toes also make it easier to work out the correct orientation.
- Make sure that the elastic is not too tight.
- Prompt your child to use their "magic thumbs" to help pull the socks on. i.e. isolating their thumbs to get them under the socks to pull up.