Dressing Strategies

Objective: Dressing involves many skills; visual perception, motor planning, balance, gross motor, and fine motor skills. Independence in dressing contributes to a real feeling of mastery which contributes to a healthy self-esteem.

Dressing: Where to Begin?

- ☑ Start dressing and undressing instruction early, to establish a routine with the child.
- ☑ Do each dressing task the same way each time so a predictable sequenced series of steps is repeated.
- ☑ Describe what you are doing as you are doing it with the child. For example, "Now I am putting your right foot in. Now I am putting your left leg in. Now you are standing while I am pulling up your pants."
- ☑ As your child begins to anticipate the next step, allow time for your child to cooperate in the process. For example, pause as the child's hand is placed in the sleeve hole and allow time for him to push his arm through independently.
- ☑ Determine the developmental skill level of the child and teach the next developmental steps for each dressing task.
- ☑ Remember: Undressing is learned before dressing.
- ☑ Give the child sufficient time to react.
- ☑ Reinforce the child's efforts.

Developmental Pre-Dressing Checklist

APPROXIMATE AGE	SKILL
One Year	☑ Holds arm up for sleeve ☑ Pushes arms through sleeve ☑ Pushes leg through pants ☑ Holds foot up for sock ☑ Holds foot up for shoe ☑ Likes to pull off shoes ☑ Unties bow on shoe
One and a half years	☑ Removes socks ☑ Tries to put on shoes
Two Years	☑ Finds armhole ☑ Removes unfastened shirt ☑ Helps push pants down ☑ Purposively removes shoes if laces are untied
Two and a half years	☑ Puts on front-button coat, shirt, sweater ☑ Removes elastic-waist pants ☑ Tries to put on socks ☑ Unbuttons large button ☑ Unsnaps front snaps

Two and a half to Three years	☑ Buttons large button

Three years	☑ Puts on T-shirt (May need some assistance) ☑ Needs assistance to remove t-shirt ☑ Finds front of clothing most of the time ☑ Pulls down pant independently to remove ☑ Puts on sock with difficulty turning the heel ☑ Puts on shoes without fasteners ☑ Buttons several buttons ☑ Unzips a non-separating zipper (e.g., pants) ☑ Tries to lace a shoe ☑ Closes front snaps
Three and a half years	☑ Puts on pants (not knowing front from back) ☑ Unzips a separating zipper (e.g., jacket) ☑ Unbuckles shoes or belt
Four years	☑ Removes pullover garment independently ☑ Consistently knows front and back of clothing ☑ Puts pants on with little assistance needed ☑ Can turn clothing right side out ☑ Puts on socks with little assistance needed ☑ Puts on shoes with little assistance needed ☑ Zips a front zipper and locks the zipper tab ☑ Buckles shoes or belt ☑ Laces a shoe with difficulty
Four and a half years	☑ Zips a separating zipper ☑ Unzips back zipper ☑ Puts belt in pant loops
Five years	☑ Puts shirts on carefully ☑ Puts pants on carefully ☑ Ties knot ☑ Laces with ease

Sensory Strategies:

- ☑ Be conscious of sensitivities regarding texture; buy clothing that you know your child will like (it is more valuable for your child to be at school in an uncoordinated outfit feeling calm than to have your child at school looking beautiful and upset)
- ☑ Build a wardrobe of comfortable clothing for your child
- ☑ Encourage deep pressure activities prior to dressing to decrease the tactile sensitivities
- ☑ Wear undergarments inside out to prevent scratching seams and tags
- ☑ Increase hat tolerance through massage of the scalp and putting the hat on in front of the mirror

- ☑ If your child has difficulty guiding movement with the eyes, encourage another sensory system to compensate (e.g., touch)
- ☑ Be aware of audio and visual overload and minimize it
- ☑ Dress in front of a mirror to add visual cues to assist with motor planning
- ☑ Break the dressing skill down and have your child do the last activity, then second last and third last activity, etc. (backward chaining)
- ☑ Start an action and have your child complete the action (e.g., pulling up a zipper) if your child is having difficulty initiating the action
- ☑ If your child is fearful when body position is changed, dress them in one position (toddlers can have their diaper changed in a standing position)
- ☑ Cut labels off clothing
- ☑ If your child has sensitive feet, wear socks inside out, wash shoes to make them soft prior to wearing them and try laced shoes as they can be more effectively tightened
- ☑ Wash clothing in unscented detergent
- ☑ Dry clothing with unscented fabric softener
- ☑ Dry clothing in a dryer to decrease stiffness
- ☑ Choose softer fabrics like fleece rather than rigid items like denim
- ☑ Be conscious of noises from buckles and overall straps
- ☑ If your child cannot keep their hands out of their diaper or undergarment, overalls work very well
- ☑ Be sensitive to the length of sleeve and pant leg your child prefers
- ☑ Be aware of patterns in fabrics and distractibility the patterns may cause
- ☑ Ensure that the garment fits well; that it is not “cutting” into the skin when your child assumes another position
- ☑ Shoes that tie up can be custom tightened to your child’s liking

Other Strategies:

- ☑ Organized drawers and closets can enable a child to choose their own clothing
- ☑ Transitions for seasons may take time; discuss it, prepare for it, use social stories to explain the change (see attached)
- ☑ With fine motor difficulties choose shoes with Velcro closures and add Velcro to button backs and hoops to zippers
- ☑ Organize clothing the night before and lay the clothing out on the bed
- ☑ Encourage your child to put away the clothing so that they know where it belongs
- ☑ If balance is difficult, have your child sitting to put on socks and shoes
- ☑ Colour code clothing to help your child identify right and left
- ☑ Put labels in your child’s clothing to help identify them if they become lost
- ☑ Sing the steps while dressing
- ☑ Try dressing dolls, teddy bear, and practice fasteners
- ☑ Try backward chaining which involves having your child complete the last step of the activity, then the last two steps, etc.