

A14 – Dressing skills

Independence in dressing allows a child to have better control over what they can do and helps to build their confidence and self-esteem.

Undressing is easier than dressing and a child needs to have certain skills and the motivation to learn, to enable them to participate in learning to dress themselves.

The time it takes to dress, from the individual attention that the parent has previously spent with the baby and toddler, is a long gradual progression to a child taking time to enjoy what may appear to them to be a complex task.

While learning to dress themselves, children are constantly learning additional things about their body awareness, position, perception, image and physical range of movement, as well as organisational skills, eye-hand coordination and visual perceptual skills. For some children it may be more of a challenge depending on their individual abilities.

Aim: to support the child with achieving small purposeful outcomes (undressing and finishing off dressing of outer garments) and work towards increasing independent responses by providing:

Additional support to help with increasing tolerance and acceptance of unfamiliar or new activities for sensorimotor development, in **touch processing of garments, identifying the position of themselves and the garment, and how or where the garment fits.**

- Does the child need to be supported well in seated or lying positions, for stable propping and adjustments for raising limbs or pulling items over their head?
- Does the child require a mirror image to reinforce them with visual feedback?

Use **hand over hand technique** to teach motor control with the coordinated use of hands in where and how to grasp items, the level of force and control required in placing the item off or on their body.

Ensure that there is plenty of **time and repeated opportunity** to practice each garment and give them time to respond. Use simple or loose fitting clothing.

Be prepared to **allow the child to adapt** to their own methods or preferred way of doing things eg, wearing the garment inside out, wellies on the opposite feet, etc, to give them the opportunity to feel positive and take some control of the task. More refinement can come later on.

Activities

Introduce the activities at a graded level within individual level of tolerance.

Dressing up: putting on hats, gloves, jewellery, footwear, scarves, glasses and different character outfits etc. and have fun in creating or make believe play.

Use action songs: ‘Simon says’ or ‘peek-a-boo’ as arm or leg shoots through.

Dressing up dolls and teddies

Helping to finish off everyday tasks: putting on a small pillow case or doing up chunky buttons on duvet covers or chunky knit cardigans and coats.

Strategies that may help dressing skill achievements

- Describe what you are doing each time throughout the dressing and undressing process.
- Encourage them to assist you by offering arms or legs to dress or undress and praise their achievements
- Touch and get them to feel their body, arm or leg before dressing, to reinforce touch processing.
- Try to use the same routine each time to reinforce their understanding or learnt concepts.
- Backwards chaining is a technique that we all use without realising it in preparing and placement of the garment eg we start off the zip and the child finishes off the task.

See additional - A3 – Body awareness

Frequency of use: Complete 10-15 minutes sessions every day or at least three times a week.

Monitor the child's level of response interest and motivation in the task and adjust accordingly