

Dressing

Becoming independent in dressing will usually take a typical child four years of practice.

Learning to undress usually happens before learning to dress. Children with developmental disorders such as intellectual impairment or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are likely to face difficulties with dressing.

Dressing depends on your child's ability to:

- know where their bodies are in space and how body parts relate
- coordinate movements of their limbs
- manipulate clothing and fasteners
- choose appropriate clothing
- stabilise themselves whilst reaching and bending
- organise and remember steps of dressing
- distinguish between right and left sides of the body
- differentiate the front and back of clothing
- tolerate certain textures and fabrics

Strategies to support your child include:

- ✓ start with loose-fitting and simple clothing, e.g. *elastic-waisted pants and large buttons*
- ✓ provide lots of opportunity for practice and making mistakes
- ✓ allow lots of time and space for learning the skills – **don't practise whilst you or your child are rushed or tired**
- ✓ allow a limited choice of clothing if your child is overwhelmed by choosing what to wear, e.g. *place two shirts on their bed*
- ✓ give lots of praise and encouragement for the effort
- ✓ let your child sit down for dressing
- ✓ use picture charts and check-lists to support with remembering the sequence of the task
- ✓ teach undressing before dressing, as this is less of a challenge
- ✓ teach the last step first – once the last step is mastered then teach the second last step and so on
- ✓ label the child's wardrobe with pictures to help locate and store clothing in places that can be easily reached
- ✓ play dress-ups
- ✓ wear clothes with front and back clues, e.g. *a picture at the front and a tag at the back*
- ✓ try not to step in too soon – **only when help is really needed**

Typical developmental stages in learning to dress:

Age (year)	Typical Developmental Stages
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Holds out arms and legs to cooperate with dressing• Puts arms through sleeves and legs through pants
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removes shoes if laces are untied• Helps pull down pants• Finds arm hole in a t-shirt
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Puts on shoes without fasteners (may be the wrong foot though!)• Puts on socks (with the heel on top maybe!)• Dresses with supervision
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Puts on socks correctly• Ties shoe laces• Knows front and back of clothing
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dressing unsupervised• Ties and unties knots

An Occupational Therapist can support with the development of various skills required for dressing, such as:

- learning and cognitive building up the patience to finish various dressing tasks; *knowing where to start and what step is next.*
- gross motor skills, e.g. *standing on one leg to put on pants*
- fine motor skills, e.g. *doing up buttons, laces and zips*
- awareness of time and space, dressing for certain occasions and weather conditions
- sensory processing, offering support when sensitivity levels to certain fabrics, temperatures and textures impact on dressing

For further information about Fabic Occupational Therapy Services,
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