

Dressing skills

Developmental milestones for dressing skills*

Age	Developmental dressing skills/milestones
1 year olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to remove socks • Can put on/take off a loose fitting hat • Begins to help with dressing, such as pushing arms through sleeves
2-3 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to remove shoes • Able to remove simple items of clothing, such as pulling down trousers • Able to undo a large button • Pulls on easy clothing, such as a coat, without fastening
3-4 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undresses independently • Able to button/unbutton large, easy to access buttons • Able to put on shoes, although may need help in selecting the correct feet • Able to unzip clothing • Can dress with supervision, i.e. requires help with orientation of clothes
4-5 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to do up a zip, including aligning the pieces together at the bottom of the zip, with practise • May need some help with clothing if it is inside out • Clasps on trousers may still be a challenge • Can put on socks with the heel in the correct place
5-6 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can dress independently, although may still need help with some more complicated fastenings, such as tight waistbands with buttons • Can tie shoelaces (although due to prevalence of other fastenings, e.g. Velcro, this may be later)

*These milestones are intended as a guide only. A child's ability to develop dressing skills is highly dependent on experience and opportunities to practice, family/cultural expectations and clothing choices.

Have a think about the last time you learnt a new skill; what was it that helped you learn this? How did you feel? What kept you motivated to keep going, even when it felt difficult? How many times did you practise before the new skill became automatic? If you were to do it again, is there anything you would do differently?

Things to consider when encouraging dressing skills

Chronological order: work on dressing skills in the order in which they would typically be achieved (see above). Start by encouraging them to be involved in the process, rather than leaving them to do it all by themselves straight away.

Practise, practise, practise: give your child opportunities to practise as much as possible. Little and often is preferred over longer, less frequent sessions.

Time: is it easier for your child to dress at certain times of the day or on certain days of the week? It may be helpful to practise when there is plenty of time available, for example at the weekend or when getting ready for a bath may be better, than later in the day when they are putting their night clothes on and feeling tired.

Mood: if your child is tired or hungry, they are less likely to succeed. Be mindful of this.



Environment: Reduce distractions as much as possible to help them stay focused on learning the new skill.

Making it easier:

- ✔ Sitting down on the floor may help make the task easier
- ✔ Practising in front of a mirror might make it easier for your child to see what they are doing
- ✔ Loose clothing is easier to get on/off than tight fitting clothing
- ✔ When beginning to learn fastenings, your child may find it easier to work with the item of clothing on their lap
- ✔ Large buttons and zip pulls are easier to manipulate than smaller ones
- ✔ Coloured heels and toes on socks, labels, pockets and images may help children differentiate the top from the bottom and the front from the back of garments



Setting the 'just right' challenge with your child

It is important to enable your child to gain a sense of achievement when learning a new skill. The 'just right' challenge ensures that you are encouraging your child to develop their skills and independence, whilst ensuring that the goal they are working towards is realistic. The sense of achievement that they experience acts as a great motivator to encourage your child to keep working towards mastering these skills. Setting realistic and achievable goals with your child can help them to develop their independence with dressing.



Things to consider:

- How difficult is the particular item of clothing they are required to wear?
- How much of the task do you/they expect to complete by themselves?
- What support will you provide?

What can you do to support your child with developing dressing skills?

- ✔ Encourage your child to monitor their own progress by asking questions like 'how did that go?' or 'what could make that better?'
- ✔ Some children may need direct, simple prompts when completing the dressing task, such as 'use both hands' or 'look what you're doing' or 'pinch and pull'
- ✔ You can use actions alongside prompts, if your child finds it helpful to see what it is that they should be doing. For example, stretching your arm up to demonstrate how to put it in to a sleeve
- ✔ Some children find it helpful to have 'hands on' help to experience the action required. For example, hold your hand over or under theirs as you pull up a zip
- ✔ Give lots of praise to reward their effort, identifying clearly which action you are proud of them for

References:

J. Hayton – Get your coat: examining the development of independent dressing skills in young children with visual impairment in comparison with young children with Down syndrome and typically developing children.

Contact us

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