

Handout 4

Dressing tricks and tips

- It is often faster and easier to dress your child rather than letting him have a go. Therefore, you may have to allocate times when you let him dress himself, probably when you are under no time pressure. Making a big fuss when he does anything for himself will boost his confidence and self-esteem.
- Dressing requires a range of movement and a degree of muscle strength and coordination. Your child will also need a degree of balance and fine motor skills.
- To prepare for dressing skills, look for tasks and games that develop motor skills, particularly those around fine motor hand skills. Mix and match activities.
- Describe actions and parts of the body as you help your child to dress. Don't worry too much about right and left – that will come later. Be consistent: always get him to put the same clothes on in the same way.
- Velcro® is great, and a good starting point. However, new Velcro® sometimes needs a great deal of force to separate the two sides, or as it ages it can get so clogged with fluff that it no longer grips. Use a fine-toothed comb to tease the threads out.
- Big buttons are easier than small buttons, as long as the buttonholes are large enough. Colour-contrast button and buttonholes are large enough. Colour-contrast button and material for practice. If you have a crafty friend or relative, see if they can create a button fastening activity. This one (right) is made from strips of felt with contrasting buttons.
- A small button in the inside top back of clothing helps ensure clothes are the right way up and right way round. Label locations are not reliable enough. Some labels can pose a problem to children with sensory issues, so a degree of lateral thinking may be required.
- Use a zip pull to make it easier for the child to slide the zip up or down. You can buy them quite cheaply online or you can buy character ones to engage the child. Alternatively, you can just loop a hair bobble through.



- For teaching purposes, look for a bold contrast between zip teeth and the fabric of the zip. You can buy zips of different colours and mix and match. This will make both the teeth and process more visible. Bigger zips are easier to manipulate and to learn how to use.



- Suggest appropriate clothing, such as joggers or elasticated shorts. Opt for clothing items that are stretchy and/or not too tight.
- Start off sitting down to pull joggers on, as balancing on one leg makes the process much more difficult. Tie in undressing with potty training or toileting skills.
- When your child grows out of his coat, try to avoid buying one that is significantly different, as this may require a new skillset.
- Hoods on coats provide a great starting point. A furry hood, or a button inside, helps the child know the coat is the right way up.
- Suggest that your child's school or nursery make his coat peg easily accessible (perhaps on the end of the row). Also, request bright, bold or tactile signage to identify the peg. Make a similar suggestion for their locker position.
- As he progresses, encourage him to be systematic about where he puts his clothing when he takes it off. A chair is a really good place. Once he starts dressing himself more, place his clothes on the chair in the order he needs to put them on.
- If he has useful vision, he may find it helpful to have a visual timetable showing the order of dressing.
- Shoelaces are a difficult skill for all children to acquire. Therefore, learning this is best left until other dressing skills are secure. However, the prerequisite skills – like developing the pincer grip and threading – can be introduced with a view to tying laces when your child is ready.
- There is always more than one way to do something!