

## Dressing

Children usually start to develop dressing skills in the toddler years from approximately 12 to 18 months. They may start by putting an arm out for you to put the sleeves of their coat on, or pushing their foot towards you when getting ready to go out.

Independence in dressing usually takes a number of years of practice with skills usually initiated when children are toddlers. It takes time and needs to be taught and practiced frequently. When children achieve dressing skills it's a huge accomplishment and great step in their independence!

Learning to undress is one of the first skills that children learn as part of their independence. A good time to start supporting your child with dressing skills is at bedtime, allowing your child to complete the final step in undressing by pulling off an item of clothing such as socks.

**On the next pages are some dressing tips to support your child in making those steps toward independent dressing.**



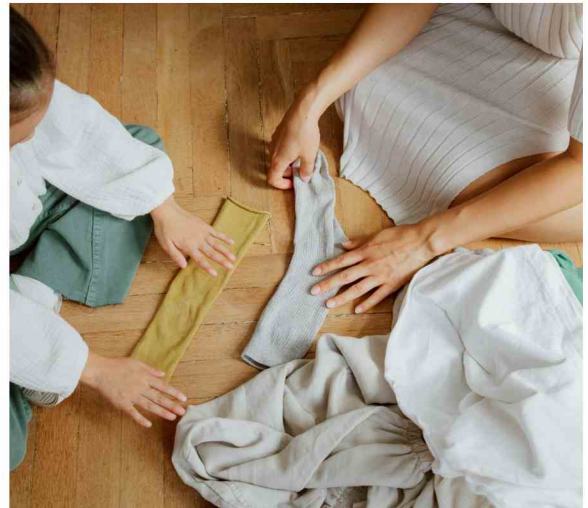


### Getting Started

When helping your child dress, it's important to create an engaging, structured environment that encourages independence while also providing guidance. Start with simple clothing items, use clear routines, and make the experience fun through activities like games and songs. Additionally, offer support and encouragement when needed, giving them time to figure things out while gently guiding them when they get stuck.

### Dressing Tips:

- Start by practicing undressing at the end of the day before dressing.
- Minimize distractions during dressing or undressing.
- Talk through the process when dressing or undressing, explaining actions like "push arm in."
- Start with simple clothes that have limited fasteners, like pants, socks, and pull-on trousers or skirts.
- Play with toys with fasteners and dress-up clothes for practice.
- Make dressing routines fun and engaging by incorporating songs and games.
- Lay clothes out in the correct sequence on the bed or floor, not layered on top of each other.
- If your child is struggling, allow them time to think and work out what's going wrong. Give them guidance. Step in when they are really stuck and talk it through.
- Try cutting a large sticker in two halves and sticking one side in each shoe to help your child match them up correctly.
- Sit against a wall when putting on socks and shoes to make it easier.



### Activity: Backward Chaining

Backward chaining is where the adult performs most of the dressing task and the child performs the last step of the task. For example; putting on socks, the adult puts the sock over the toe and heel, and the child is encouraged to pull the sock up the ankle and leg, receiving lots of positive praise for completing the task. Explain each step that you are doing and build on each step. When they have mastered the last step, let them master the second to last step. Build on all of the stages until the child can complete the activity confidently. The key is practice and praise!

Examples of backward chaining when putting on socks. Demonstrate putting thumbs into the back of the sock when practicing. Say "Thumbs in" and practice holding thumbs up before.

#### Step 1:

Adult puts sock on over toes, heel, along foot and ankle.  
Child encouraged to pull sock up leg.

#### Step 2:

Adult puts sock on over toes, heel and along foot.  
Child encouraged to pull sock over ankle and up leg.

#### Step 3:

Adult puts sock on over toes and heel.  
Child encouraged to pull sock along foot, up ankle and up leg.

#### Step 4:

Adult puts sock on over toes.  
Child encouraged to pull sock over heel, along foot, ankle and up leg.

#### Step 5:

Child puts sock on over toes, heel, along foot, up ankle and up leg.  
Child completes all of the steps independently!

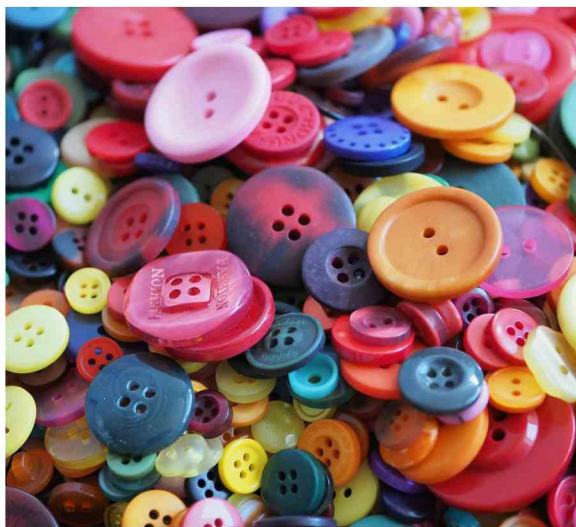
Give lots of praise and encouragement and continue to practice.



## Buttons

### Practice Tips

- Practice lacing activities and encourage your child to pinch the end of the lace when threading it through holes.
- Start with large buttons with large stretchy buttonholes – Adults' cardigans are ideal for practicing. Once your child has mastered doing up and undoing large buttons decrease the size of the buttons.
- Practice doing up buttons on clothes laid on a table in front of your child or on the floor.



- Use simple language such as 'Pinch, post, and pull' when doing up and undoing buttons.
- Start the button for the child by placing it halfway through the buttonhole, and encourage your child to 'pinch the button and pull' through the buttonhole to complete the task.
- Demonstrate placing a thumb on top and using a pincer grip to hold the button, posting it through the buttonhole, and pulling it through the other side.

- When able to do up buttons on items of clothing laid in front of the child then practice with the child's clothing.
- When practicing buttoning shirts. Do up the first (bottom) button on the shirt so that the buttons are evenly laid out.
- The top button on a child's polo shirt is often the most challenging button to do up and undo.

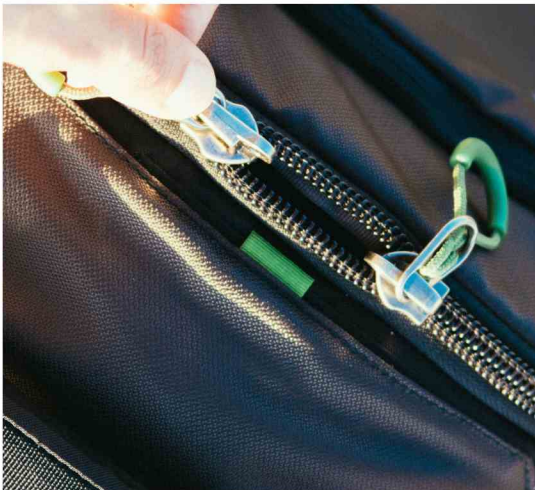




### Zips

#### Practice Tips

- The most challenging part of doing up zips is placing the pin in the retainer box. By the age of three, children usually start to pull up their zip with encouragement.
- When buying clothing with zips, always test the zips first and make sure that they run freely and smoothly.
- Start by practicing doing up zips with coats placed on a table in front of the child with the head of the coat nearest to the child's body.



- Practice opening and closing zips on a variety of items such as empty tote bags, wash bags, and makeup bags. Use empty little bags and hide toys inside to encourage them to open the zip.
- Use verbal feedback 'pull' and hand-over-hand support by laying your hand over your child's hand to start pulling up your child's zip.
- Use a *backward chaining approach* by putting the pin in the retainer box and then encouraging your child to hold the end of the zip and pull the zip up.

- Encourage your child to use a pincer grip (index finger and thumb) to hold the end of the zip and pull. Say 'pinch and pull'.
- Add a key ring or loop of ribbon or string to the end of the zip if they are struggling to grip the zip to pull up or down.
- Let the child take their time and step in when they are really struggling.

*Keep on practicing these skills and watch your child's dressing skills develop.*

