

Dressing Skills - Sensory

Helpful Tips:

Your child may find getting or being dressed difficult. They may find the smell, or feel of clothing uncomfortable/distracting

- Be aware of your child's preferred clothing.
- Cut labels out of clothing
- Wash and dry clothing in unscented detergent/ fabric softener
- Dry clothing in a dryer if possible to decrease stiffness
- Be aware of patterns in fabrics and distractions the patterns may cause



Preparing your child for dressing:

Some families have found these strategies and activities useful. Observe your child when completing these. Stop if your child becomes anxious or distressed.

- Slow rhythmic movement such as swinging or rocking in one direction i.e. back and forth or side to side
- Row the Boat use a skipping rope, or hold hands. Sit facing your child with feet outstretched and touching. Do controlled push and pull movements like a rowing exercise.
- Bear Hugs - combine your bear hugs with gentle rocking back and forth for extra calming effect.
- Deep pressure to muscles and joints such as massage, back rub or firm squeezing
- Blanket wrap or swaddling for a younger child, Snuggling in a sleeping bag, Bean bag chair or large pillows
- Activities that include heavy or resistive work to muscles
 - Lifting / pulling or pushing an appropriate heavy object a few times.
 - Standing press ups against the wall
- You may also like to try:
 - Warm or tepid bath
 - Sucking activities
 - Fidget toys



Practicing Dressing:

- Approach from the front and avoid unexpected touch.
- Reduced noise and light levels
- Break the dressing skill down into small steps. Teach the last part of the activity first such as pulling the T shirt down over the body. Then teach the second last and third last activity e.g. putting arms in the sleeves and then putting head in
- Dress the child in front of a mirror to help them to develop their body awareness and with motor planning.
- Consider the position that your child gets dressed in. If they find movement difficult stand them in one position.
- If they find balance difficult have your child sit down to put on socks and shoes and the legs of trousers
- If your child has sensitive feet, have them wear socks inside out and wash shoes to make them soft prior to wearing them.
- Try dressing dolls or teddy bears to practice opening and closing fasteners.
- Increase hat tolerance through massage of the scalp and putting the hat on in front of the mirror.

Other things to consider:

- Make a dressing routine and stick to it.
- Leave extra time for dressing and use visual cues e.g a timer, or picture / photograph
- Organise drawers and closets to help enable a child to choose their own clothing
- Choose shoes with Velcro closures and add Velcro to button backs and hoops to zips for children who have fine motor difficulties.
- Organise clothing the night before and lay the clothing out.
- Dressing for winter may be challenging: discuss it, prepare for it, and use social stories to explain it.