

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

Learning to undress usually comes about 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 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 practise and making mistakes.
- ✓ **allow** lots of time and space for learning the skills – *don't practise whilst you or your child are rushed/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 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 dressing:

Age (year)	Typical Developmental Stages
1	• Holds out arms and legs to cooperate with dressing • Puts arms through sleeves and legs through pants
2	• Removes shoes if laces are untied • Helps pull down pants • Finds arm hole in a t-shirt
3	• Puts on shoes without fasteners (although may be the wrong foot) • Puts on socks (may be with heel on top) • Dresses with supervision
4	• Puts on socks correctly • Ties shoe laces • Knows front and back of clothing
5	• 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 dressing tasks. Knowing where to start and what step is next.
- **gross motor** e.g. standing on one leg to put on pants.
- **fine motor** e.g. learning to do buttons, laces and zips.
- **awareness of time and space:** dressing for certain occasions and weather.
- **sensory processing:** offering support where sensitivity levels to certain fabrics, temperatures and textures impacts on dressing.

For further information about Fabic Occupational Therapy Services, please visit our website www.fabic.com.au or contact us on 5530 5099.