

## Self-help Skills

### Dressing

#### Methods of learning how to dress:

- Backward chaining - This is where the adult begins a task and the child completes the last step. As the child gets better the adult then does less of the task. E.g. child may initially just pull t-shirt down at front once parent has placed this over their head.
- Forward chaining - This is where the child starts the task (e.g. putting t-shirt overhead) and the adult helps with the later stages. Always demonstrate the correct dressing technique first and talk through what you are doing when you are helping a child.

#### Helpful strategies to promote dressing skills:

- Try and do each dressing task the same so a routine can be established.
- For the child to be able to learn new skills the environment must be appropriate. Think about the noise levels and distractions; other children in the room, computers, pictures on walls, toys and smells, e.g. from the kitchen.
- Allow extra time for the child to be able to learn the new techniques. Progress at the child's pace and give lots of praise for practicing skills even if they are not successful at completing the task.
- Dress in front of the mirror to provide visual cues and use to check all is correct before going out.
- Start with undressing. Undressing before bed and helping to put on pyjamas is a good time to start as you have more time at night than in the morning.
- Success is important; therefore, begin with breaking the dressing activity into small, straightforward steps. Tackle one step at a time and give help where needed with the other steps of the task.
- Practice independence with dressing at less stressful times, such as at bath time, weekends or school holidays.
- Encourage the child to sit on a chair or on the floor to support with balance.
- Elasticised waistbands and minimal fastenings are helpful when first learning to dress

### Socks

- Practice using loose fitting socks that are too big, they could even practice putting on your socks. • Avoid socks which have overly tight elastic at ankles.
- Socks with different coloured toes and or heels can make it easier for your child to get their socks the right way round.
- Encourage your child to sit when placing their socks on their feet, as they will be less likely to lose their balance.
- It is often helpful for you to sit next to or behind your child when they are completing this task as it will give you more realistic view of what elements they are finding difficult.
- You may find it helpful initially to place socks over your child's toes and allow them to pull the sock up.

- Encourage your child to place their thumbs inside the sock to assist in pulling socks onto feet.
- Teach your child to gather up the sock from the top to the heel using two hands, before placing the socks on their toes.
- Some children don't like the feeling of wearing socks and can be particularly bothered by seams, you could try turning your child's socks inside out or buy seamless socks.

### **Shoes**

- Practice with slip on shoes, slippers and wellies first. If your child has to change shoes in nursery try to avoid laces or buckles.
- It is often helpful for you to sit next to or behind your child when they are completing this task as it will give you a more realistic view of what elements they are finding difficult.
  - Put the shoes in front of your child the right way round and try the sticker trick (cut a sticker in half and stick one half in each shoe) to help them work out which shoe goes on which foot.
  - Encourage your child to sit when placing their shoes on their feet, as they will be less likely to lose their balance.
- Get your child to look at their feet to check the shoes are on the right feet.
- Once they have mastered slip on shoes move on to simple fastenings such as velcro or zips

### **Zips**

- Unzipping is easier to master than zipping up, so start here. •

Practice on a jacket with a large plastic zip.

- Start the process – you zip up and encourage the child to zip down. Then encourage the child to zip up.
- Help by fitting the two sides of the zip together (at the bottom) and create a game. Example - pretend the zip is a road – the child is the driver and it's their job to get the car to the top.
- When buying a coat with an open-ended zip, test the zip thoroughly as the ease of fastening can vary a lot.
- Attach a key ring or curtain ring to the zip to aid grip.