

## Helping Your Child Develop Independence Self-Care Skills



### Take Time to Teach

It is important that families plan time in daily routines to both teach Pre-K children tasks related to self-care and to allow time for practice of the skills. These skills build the sense of independence and confidence in developing children.

**Set up your child's areas** so that you create opportunities for your child to be independent.

- Placing materials and their personal items at their levels
- Set up your daily routines and tasks with this question in mind – “How can I teach the task in such a way as to allow him to complete this task without my help?”

**Be a good role model.**

- Model the skills you are teaching. Talk about what you are doing.
- A good way to be a model is to take turns performing steps of a task with a child. The adult should do a small step in the sequence of the skill and then ask the child to do it.
- Peers, as well as older siblings and relatives, can be excellent role models. Point out the older children's actions and ask peers to show others how to do what they have already learned.

**Incorporate self-care skills into the daily routines and schedules** of the child's home and environment. The skills become more meaningful children if they practice them throughout the day as part of their routines.

- Re-teach routines and tasks on a regular basis.
- Use visuals such as picture icons and photos. Visual strategies can be used to cue a child that it is time for a certain activity and to show a child the steps of a task.
- Use photographs, clip-art, or drawings to make your child a schedule like the one shown here.



**Use clear and easy-to-follow steps with prompts and help as needed.**



- Break down tasks into small sequential steps.
- Use visual supports such as pictures, gestures, or modeling examples to help make your directions clear.
- Provide encouragement and reinforcement throughout the steps of tasks
- Provide assistance throughout the steps of the tasks; but remember to reduce the amount of help you are giving as your child learns the skills. Gradually reducing how much you assist will help your child become more confident.
- Don't forget to use **“Wait Time”** to give your child time to process the directions, recall the steps of the task, and allow for difficulties with language and/or motor processing.

**Collaborate with others**

When you are working on self-care skills such as dressing, it is important to discuss your plans with others who help care for and teach your child (for example, baby-sitters, grandparents, day-care providers, teachers, therapists). If your child attends a child-care setting or attend preschool, let the teachers know that you are working on certain skills so that they can be aware of your goals and assist in following up.

Following are some strategies that can help develop independence in this area. Remember that dressing skills can be difficult because they involve the use of several developmental skills such as gross and fine motor and sequencing steps of dressing.

- Choose clothing that is easy to put on
- Consider using colored dots to help identify left and right shoes and the front and back of clothing
- A visual work system can help children remember the steps to dressing.

Seek the advice of your pediatrician or a developmental professional if your child has ongoing difficulty with dressing and/or might be exhibiting motor coordination, strength, or motor processing difficulties.

**Prompting and assisting:**

- If your child cannot put on the shirt the right way, line up the tag and place the shirt part way over her head. Let her pull it down. Help the child finish by putting her arm in the armhole.
- Encourage children to dress by themselves; just provide minimal assistance. Begin with older infants and toddlers by encouraging them to help pull socks on and off, pull up pants and help put their arms through sleeves. As children get older, encourage them to dress themselves but help with challenging steps such as zipping and buttoning.
- Let your child practice putting buttons through holes. Choose some clothing that has big buttons and big button holes. First take buttons that are loose and slide them through the holes. Then work on the actual buttons on the clothing.

**Teaching Dressing Skills During Play and Other Activities**

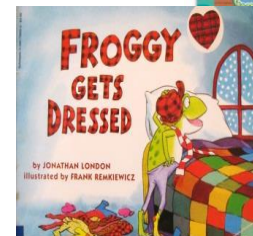
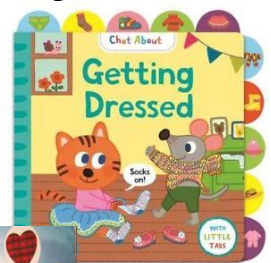
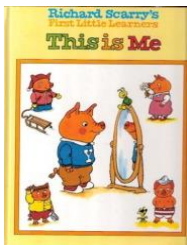
- Teach your child that the label for pants and shirts goes in the back. Let him practice by putting the clothes out for dolls or stuffed animals. Put the label side on the floor. Lay the doll or stuffed animal with its back on the floor. Slide the clothes on. Begin with shirts that button or snap and let him attempt to button or snap. Toys which provide a variety of fasteners are also available (the dress-up monkey is an example).
- Provide your child with "dress-up" items and allow time for your child to engage in dress-up activities. Encourage him to try to get the clothes on and off with minimal assistance. Provide dress-up items with a variety of fasteners, including some that are easy to manipulate (ex. Velcro fasteners). The dress-up items shown here are purchased but most children enjoy playing "dress-up" with a variety of clothing, including "grown-up clothes". Many types of items can be used for dress-up and imagined to be super hero capes, hats, etc.



- **Provide books** about dressing – both picture books and books that you read aloud to your child. It is also important to include board books for children who need a sturdier, easier to manipulate, or basic concept format. examples are listed below:



- *Bear Gets Dressed* – A guessing Game Story – Harriet Ziefert
- *Froggy Gets Dressed* – Jonathan London
- *Get Dressed, Max and Millie* – Felicity Brooks
- *How Do I Put It On?* – Shigeo Watanabe
- *Jesse Bear, What Will You Wear* – Nancy White Carlstrom
- *Little Mouse Gets Ready* – Jeff Smith
- *Maggie and Michael Get Dressed* – Denise Fleming
- *Pete the Cat and His Four Groovy Buttons* – Eric Litwin
- *This is Me* – Richard Scarry
- *Freddie Gets Dressed* (board book) – Nicola Smee
- *Getting Dressed* (board book) – Scholastic Let's Chat series



Most public libraries have collections which include books about dressing; but if your library does not have any, request that they order on loan from another library.

## Addressing Your Child's Unique Needs

- Children who experience difficulties with motor, processing, or remembering the steps of dressing might become easily discouraged or frustrated with the task of dressing. Young children most often respond to praise and small rewards. Some children might need more reinforcement such as a reward strategy.



- Dawn Sirett's book, *Time to Get Dressed* (DK Publishing) is an example of a strategy that includes photos and stickers. Stickers can be used at the end of the entire sequence or during specific steps of the dressing sequence.
- A similar strategy of rewarding either the entire dressing or specific steps can be developed as a script which would serve as both a visual sequencing support and a reward chart.
- Examples of reward charts can be found online. Reward charts can be made simply by drawing the boxes on a sheet of paper and stars, checks, smiling faces can be drawn in instead of using stickers.
- Examples of reward charts for dressing are shown below:



A general reward chart  
(<http://www.free-reward-cards.com>)



Reward chart with specific steps and/or stickers  
(LessonPix – subscription fee for use of site)

- Children who have difficulty staying focused on dressing long enough to complete the steps or who have difficulty remembering the steps of dressing sometimes benefit from visuals and charts which show them the steps. These types of pictures are good reminders of the steps and can help children become more independent.
- Examples of Visuals for Dressing



Chart showing specific steps  
(Boardmaker – purchase necessary)



Chart showing sequence within one step  
([www.YourTherapySource.com-free](http://www.YourTherapySource.com-free))



Chart with dressing as a step within a routine  
(openclipart.org-free)