

# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph: 8255 7137  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Dressing

*Getting kids dressed can be a battle. We all know the dilemma; it will be quicker if I just do it for them, but they need to learn to do it themselves or I will be doing it for them when they are twenty! Learning to dress themselves develops kid's independence and confidence as well as a sense of maturity and achievement. It will take an investment of your time now, but will save you lots in the future.*



**Dressing includes a number of skills** so developing this ability will also help your child in many other areas including:

- gross motor skills, motor planning and balance
- cognitive skills of memory, planning, sequencing, problem solving, attention and persistence
- fine motor skills for managing buttons, laces and zips
- language skills including clothing names, concepts of size, colour, temperature, space, weather, occasions and textures

**So what should my child be able to do at their age?** Children vary in their development and children with special needs will often take longer to learn skills than their peers. Here is a rough guide to the development of dressing skills:

**One year olds** can hold their arms out for you to pull sleeves on and they can push their arms through. They can push their legs through pants and hold their feet up for you to put shoes on. They can pull their shoes and socks off.

**Two year olds** can take off coats when buttons or zips are undone, help push down their pants and put their arms through armholes in tops. Most children by two can undress themselves completely. By two and a half they can try to put on socks, put on buttoned shirts (but not do up the buttons) and undo a single large button.

**Three year olds** can put on t-shirts, shoes and socks with a bit of help to get things straight and fastened, do up large front buttons, zip and unzip with help to join the zipper at the end. By three and a half kids can find the front of clothes, do up zips, snaps, press studs and hooks, unbuckle shoes and belts, put on gloves and do up a row of three or four buttons.



**Four year olds** can get dressed with little assistance. They know the back and front of clothing, can connect and do up zips, do up buckles on shoes and belts, put on socks the right way but they still need a little help with shoes. By four and a half they can step into pants and pull them up and put belts through loops.

**Five year olds** dress without any help or supervision and put t-shirts and jumpers on the right way every time. **Children can be up to seven years of age** before they master shoelaces.

### How to get started!

**Babies and toddlers** begin to pull off shoes, socks and hats,) and will sometimes then try to put them on as well. You can build on this interest by talking about their clothes and body parts as you dress them and offer them choices of clothes (just two or three reasonable options).



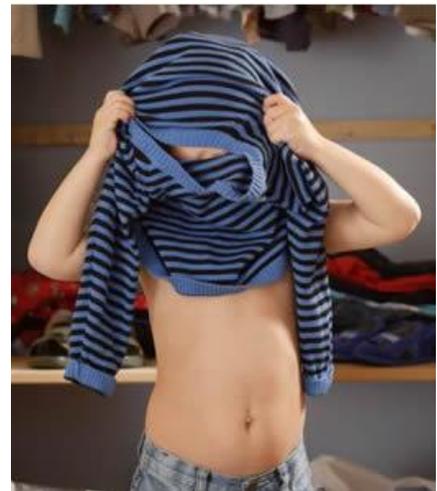
**When you want the real learning to begin choose some easy clothes** such as elastic pants, clothes with big easy buttons or velcro, clothes with clear fronts and backs, such as ones with logos or pictures.

**Next choose one piece of clothing and break the process down into a number of steps such as:**

- find the front of the shorts
- hold the shorts the right way
- push one leg through the leg hole
- push the other leg through
- pull up the shorts

**Talk through each of the steps** as you do it with your child a few times in simple words your child can understand.

Once you have talked through the steps a few times together **ask your child to do the last step** by themselves "now you pull up your pants". **By doing the last step your child gets the satisfaction of seeing the job finished!**



Once your child can do the last step ask them to do the second last step, then the third last step and work backwards until the child can do the whole process by themselves. This is called **backwards chaining** and is a great way to learn tasks with a number of steps.

**When your child is getting close to doing the whole by themselves you may still need to watch and encourage** and give the odd clue if they get stuck, but try not to jump in unless you really need to. Try to give your child a chance to solve any problems themselves.

**Tips to help make dressing a success:**

- be positive and supportive and use plenty of praise
- allow plenty of time for your child so you are not rushed
- start with undressing as it is easier than dressing
- encourage your child to sit on the floor, bed or chair when dressing
- if mornings are busy choose clothes the night before
- choose clothes together and talk about the weather as you do so
- talk about clean and dirty and establish a clear routine about what to do with dirty clothes
- teach your child strategies for fronts and backs, pictures at the front, tags at the back
- practice with dress-ups during play time when there are less time constraints
- teach fastenings by sitting behind your child and putting your arms out in front of them
- practice buttoning from the bottom to the top as it is easier to line up buttons and holes correctly
- practice buttoning in front of a mirror
- practice tasks of pushing and pulling through holes and slots, such as threading and putting coins in money boxes or things through slots
- begin with zippers on bags or backpacks before moving to clothing
- for shoes begin by practicing with a larger shoe or sock from an older sibling which can be easier
- allow your child to choose their clothes when appropriate

**Children with special needs can have motor, sensory and learning issues that make dressing more difficult to learn. An occupational therapist can help by:**

- assessing your child's motor skill development and sensory processing
- developing a plan to teach dressing
- providing activities to develop any skills needed
- discussing any modifications or equipment which may be helpful

Talking Matters has occupational therapists which can help children with special needs to develop these skills. To find out more about how an occupational therapist can help visit our website:



<http://www.talkingmatters.com.au/area-of-concern/occupational-therapy-concerns>