

Although there are limited opportunities for “dressing” in the classroom setting, there are strategies that can help develop independence in this area. It is important to share strategies with families so that there can be follow-up at home.

- 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 an occupational therapist if a child has ongoing difficulty with dressing and/or might be exhibiting motor coordination, strength, or motor processing difficulties.

Prompting and assisting:

- If the 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. Let her push her arm all the way through by herself.
- 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 after diapering 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 Classroom Activities

- Teach your students that the label for pants and shirts goes in the back. Let them 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 them attempt to button or snap. Toys which provide a variety of fasteners are also available (the dress-up monkey is an example).



Provide plenty of “dress-up” items in the dramatic play center and allow time for students to engage in dress-up activities. Encourage them 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).

- **Include books** about dressing in the classroom library as well as in teacher read-alouds. Look for books that include skills that are included in other classroom themes:
 - Books that are written in a question/answer format (for example, "What will you wear today?" "Do you need a jacket today?")
 - Books that focus on making predictions
 - Books that have rhymes, sequences, phonological concepts and information that are the focus of classroom lessons.

It is also important to include board books for children who need a sturdier, easier to manipulate, or basic concept format.

Addressing Unique Needs

- Children who experience difficulties with motor, processing, or cognitive components of the steps of dressing might become easily discouraged or frustrated with the task of dressing. Motivational and reinforcement/reward strategies should be included throughout activities.
 - Provide visuals that illustrate the steps of dressing.
 - Include photos with rhyming descriptions of the steps of dressing with stickers included. 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 visual supports for dressing are shown below:



Examples of Visuals for Dressing

Ideas for using visual supports:

- Include supports for making choices based on likes and dislikes, weather, and varying occasions.
- Teach sequential steps for dressing (for example, the steps of putting on a shirt)
- Include dressing as a part of the daily routine,



Collaborate with Families: It is important to communicate and coordinate with families when developing expectations, goals, and strategies for all self-care skills. Share visual strategies and important skill development information with families so that they can reinforce and follow up at home.

Examples of Free Visuals

Visuals from Head Start Inclusion Center

Tip Sheets from National Center for Pyramid Innovation

Developmental Activities from Help Me Grow, Florida

References and Resources

Head Start Center for Inclusion. Classroom Visuals and Supports. Office of Head Start Department of Health and Human Services. <https://headstartinclusion.org/tools-and-supports/classroom-visuals-and-supports/> (nd).

Florida Department of Education. Division of Early Learning. Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards 2017. <https://flbt5.floridaearlylearning.com/standards.html>

National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI). Resources for "Practical Strategies" and "Using Visuals." Department of Education, Office of Special Programs. (nd).

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