

# Getting dressed

What to expect from your child's dressing skills and how to encourage them, with some book suggestions on the topic. By **Annette Rawstrone**



Children are naturally driven to become independent and one of the ways that your toddler is likely to assert this is by wanting to get dressed on their own.

While this can be slow and frustrating – not to mention the unusual clothing combinations – it is an excellent way for your child to practise a range of skills. Plus, once they have mastered getting dressed, it's one less challenge for you in the morning and another step towards being ready for school.

## AN IMPORTANT SKILL

Think about the number of times in a day that we need to remove or put on items of clothing. It's not just when we get up or go to bed, but whenever we leave the house, visit the toilet or need to prepare for another activity, such as putting on waterproofs or an apron.

Having to wait for an adult's help while their friends do the task unaided could affect your child's self-esteem. They will also miss out on the feeling of accomplishment which comes from pulling on their own wellies or fastening some tricky buttons.

## DRESSING AND LEARNING

Dressing themselves helps children to learn and develop in a variety of ways, such as:

- Gross motor skills – when manoeuvring arms into sleeves, or balancing to put a leg into trousers.
- Fine motor skills – when manipulating fiddly objects such as zips, Velcro or buttons.
- Cognitive skills – for example, sequencing as they think what item of clothing to put on next; learning what specific items to wear on which part of the body; and learning about what clothing is appropriate for a particular activity or kind of weather.



## PATIENCE AND PRACTICE

Learning how to get dressed needs patience and practice for both you and your child. Don't be surprised if your child forgets to put their underwear on, insists on a Batman outfit for going to the shops, puts clothing on back to front or inside out, or gets their shoes on the wrong feet... frequently.

## MILESTONES

Every child develops at their own rate, so try to follow their pace, but the following can be used as a rough guide to what you can expect your child to do during the learning process:

### One-year-olds:

- pull socks and footwear off
- hold out their arms and legs for clothing
- help by pushing their arms or legs through garments.

### Two-year-olds:

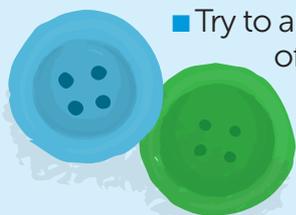
- pull down skirts or trousers with elasticated waists
- attempt to put on socks or shoes
- put on loose shirts or coats, but not button them
- unfasten chunky buttons.

### Three-year-olds:

- pull on socks and shoes (although not always on the right feet)
- take off clothing without help, unless the item is tight or has fiddly fastenings
- fasten chunky buttons
- pull zips up and down
- put on clothing with some help, such as pulling tops over their head.

### Four-year-olds:

- start to identify the right feet for shoes



- know the front and back of garments
- fasten shoes and belts (not bows)
- connect zips and fasten them.

### Five-year-olds:

- dress with minimal help and supervision.

## HANDY TIPS

Dressing your child yourself can often seem like the quickest and easiest option. But try to be patient whenever time allows in order to help your child's progression – not just while they accomplish the task but during the frequent outfit changes as they show off their new-found skill.

Support your child as they learn how to get dressed by:

- In the early stages, talk to them as you dress them – 'Put your arms up so I can pull your T-shirt over your head', or 'Let's put your woolly hat on because it's cold outside'.
- Choose clothes that are relatively easy for your toddler to take on or off unaided, such as skirts or trousers with elasticated waistbands, shoes with Velcro and clothing with big buttons on the front, rather than the back.
- Start by encouraging your child to undress by themselves before bed.
- Discuss the order of clothing in simple stages as you help them to dress.
- Select clothing with logos or pictures on the front to help your child know which way around to wear it. Show them the tags in clothes and explain these are often at the back.
- Try to allow a realistic amount of time for getting dressed so that you don't need to rush your child or take over



– select clothing the night before if time is tight.

- Provide a range of fun dressing-up clothes for your child to practise with, as well as clothes with simple fastenings for their teddy bears

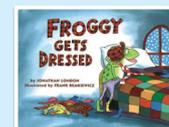
and dolls to wear.

- Don't always jump in to help or 'baby' your child – give them time to fiddle with zips or buckles by themselves.
- Speak to your child's key person or a health visitor if you are concerned that your child is struggling with dressing skills more than their friends.



**Don't Put Your Pants on Your Head, Fred!**  
by Carly Hart and Leigh Hodgkinson

Learning how to get dressed has never been so fun – with wacky illustrations and hilarious, rhyming text.



**Froggy Gets Dressed**  
by Jonathan London and Frank Remkiewicz

Getting dressed for a romp in the snow isn't easy as it sounds. Will Froggy pull it all together?



**Ella Sarah Gets Dressed**  
by Margaret Chodos-Irvine

Ella Sarah may be little, but she has a 'big' sense of style.