

Self-Help Skills for Children

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If you have children (or even just one little person), you know that the added time of dressing in boots, coats, hats, and mittens can make it even more stressful trying to get out of the house! As children age, they can assist more in their own self-care, especially dressing. Independence in dressing is not only great for helping busy parents, but it also fosters improved fine motor skills (button, snaps, zippers), cognitive skills (sequencing steps), visual perception (front/back of clothing) ...and self-confidence in children.

Here are some general age-level guidelines for what a child can (and should!) do for herself or himself:

10 MONTHS

- Can assist by pulling leg or arm out of clothing
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12 MONTHS

- Can remove shoes when unfastened; May show interest in putting them on by raising foot
 - Assists by pushing arm and leg through clothing holes
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18 MONTHS

- Can take off mittens
 - Can put a hat on and take off
 - Can remove an unbuttoned shirt
 - Can unzip a coat
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24 MONTHS

- Able to pull off pants
 - Can unbutton large buttons
 - Can find arm holes in a tee-shirt
 - Can put on shoes with a little help
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30 MONTHS

- Puts on a front-button shirt (can't button on own yet)
 - Puts on socks
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3 YEARS OLD

- Can undo snaps and laces
 - Learning the difference between the front and back of clothes
 - Can pull up pants independently
 - Able to button large buttons
 - Can put socks and shoes on, but may have trouble with heel placement of sock and which foot for shoes
 - Can dress self with some adult assistance
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4 YEARS OLD

- Can put on socks with correct heel placement
 - Can put shoes on the correct feet
 - Can buckle and unbuckle belts
 - Can dress with adult supervision only
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5-6 YEARS OLD

- Can tie shoes on own
 - Can put a belt through loops
 - Able to fully dress with more speed
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SOME TIPS TO WORK ON DRESSING

- Even when your child is an infant, try to describe what you are doing each time you dress your child. Using phrases such as “give me your foot”, “over your head”, and “where’s your arm?” will help with his/her understanding later as he/she begins to work on this skill.
- Buttons, snaps, and zippers are often easier to learn if your child is not wearing the clothing. Try having him/her button a shirt you are wearing or lay a shirt on a table in front of them. Dressing dolls is also great practice.
- When teaching a new dressing skill, it’s best to give the child a sense of success. You can do this by starting the task for him but allowing him to finish. By using a strategy called “backward chaining”,

the parent completes all but the final step in a skill (i.e., parent puts child's t-shirt overhead and pulls arms through sleeves and asks the child to pull t-shirt down to waist). After the child has mastered this part, then stop your assistance with the previous step (putting arms through the holes). Continue in this manner until the child performs the task independently.

- When your child is old enough, engage her/him in the dressing process by allowing her/him to make a choice from two outfits (that you choose).
This way, you are selecting what is appropriate for the activity and season, while giving your child a sense of independence.
 - Progress from dressing visual areas to non-visual areas (i.e., easier for child to put pants and socks, since he can clearly see what he is doing).
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