



DRESSING SKILLS - SENSORY

HELPFUL TIPS

Your child may find the smell or feel of clothing uncomfortable/distracting. They may also find the act of being dressed difficult.

- Be conscious of the feel of materials, buying clothing that you know your child will like. They may prefer softer fabrics like fleece rather than rigid items like denim
- Cut labels out of clothing
- Wash and dry clothing in unscented detergent/ fabric softener
- Dry clothing in a dryer, if possible, to decrease stiffness
- Be aware of patterns in fabrics and distractions the patterns may cause

Preparing your child for dressing

These strategies and activities can help to relax the nervous system, working towards reducing your child's exaggerated responses to sensory input. Observe your child when completing these. Stop if your child becomes anxious or distressed.

- Slow rhythmic movement such as swinging or rocking in one direction i.e. back and forth or side to side
- Row the Boat; use a skipping rope or hold hands. Sit facing your child with feet outstretched and touching. Do controlled push and pull movements like a rowing exercise.
- Bear Hugs - combine your bear hugs with gentle rocking back and forth for extra calming effect.
- Deep pressure to muscles and joints such as massage, back rub or firm squeezing
- Blanket wrap or swaddling for a younger child, Snuggling in a sleeping bag, Bean bag chair or large pillows

Proprioceptive activities i.e. those that include heavy work to muscles, traction or compression through joints, or strong contraction of muscles around joints.

- Moving furniture, heavy boxes, by pushing them along the floor
- Standing press ups against the wall

You may also like to try:

- Warm or tepid bath
- Sucking activities
- Fidget toys
- Lavender, vanilla, banana or soothing smells



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Practicing Dressing:

- Reduced noise and light levels (turn off the radio, TV and lights)
- Break the dressing skill down into small steps. Teach the last part of the activity first such as pulling the T shirt down over the body. Then teach the second last and third last activity e.g. putting arms in the sleeves and then putting head in
- Dress the child in front of a mirror to help them to develop their body awareness and with motor planning
- Consider the position that your child gets dressed in. If they find movement difficult stand them in one position
- If they find balance difficult have your child sit down to put on socks and shoes and the legs of trousers
- If your child has sensitive feet, have them wear socks inside out and wash shoes to make them soft prior to wearing them
- Try dressing dolls or teddy bears to practice opening and closing fasteners
- Increase hat tolerance through massage of the scalp and putting the hat on in front of the mirror.

Other things to consider:

- Organise drawers and closets to help enable a child to choose their own clothing
- Choose shoes with Velcro closures and add Velcro to button backs and hoops to zips for children who have fine motor difficulties
- Organise clothing the night before and lay the clothing out. Encourage your child to put it away so that he knows where it belongs
- Transitions for seasons may take time: discuss it, prepare for it, and use social stories to explain