

DRESSING

What Is This Developmental Skill?

Dressing involves selecting appropriate clothing, putting garments on in the correct order, managing fasteners, recognizing front and back, and adjusting clothing for weather, comfort, and social expectations.

How Does This Normally Develop?

Children first participate by lifting their arms, pushing their legs through clothing, or removing simple garments. They gradually learn to put on shirts, pants, socks, shoes, and coats. Fasteners such as buttons, zippers, snaps, and shoelaces usually require additional motor development and practice.

Adults continue helping children choose clothing appropriate for the weather and situation.

How Can Neglect Interfere With Its Development?

A child may not have had clothing that fit properly, enough clean clothing, or an adult available to teach dressing skills. Clothing may have been selected based on availability rather than comfort or weather. Some children may also experience sensory discomfort related to seams, tags, textures, tightness, or temperature. Children who experienced frequent moves may become unusually attached to particular clothing.

What Might This Look Like?

The child may:

- Put clothing on backward or in the wrong order.
- Struggle with buttons, zippers, or shoelaces.
- Wear clothing that is inappropriate for the weather.
- Refuse certain textures or styles.
- Wear the same outfit repeatedly.
- Become overwhelmed by choosing what to wear.
- Resist changing clothing even when it is dirty or too small.

Parenting Implications

Caregivers can reduce demands by offering two appropriate choices, laying clothing out in order, and selecting garments the child can manage successfully. Sensory preferences should be taken seriously. Skills involving fasteners may require direct teaching or occupational therapy support.

Caregivers should avoid shaming a child for clothing choices or dressing delays.

From Understanding to Attunement

Difficulty dressing may involve motor planning, sensory needs, attachment to possessions, or limited experience. An attuned response might be: "Getting dressed has many steps. I will help with the hard part, and you can do the part you are ready to do."