

Caring and Teaching

Dressing times may seem like the most ordinary of all the daily routines in caring for young children. It is tempting to want to get through the process as quickly as possible, especially when trying to change a squirming, crying baby or a toddler or 2-year-old who wants to do everything by himself. If you take the time to pay attention to each child during dressing times, this routine offers many opportunities to interact with the child and to build a child's sense of competence.

Your Own Views

- How do you feel when a child protests about getting dressed? How do you help minimize protests and make getting dressed as easy and as comfortable as possible for both you and the child?
- Do you make suggestions to families about what their children should wear to your program? How do you feel when families do not follow your suggestions? Can you think of some reasons why they do not follow your advice?
- Do you believe a child should dress himself? If so, at what age do you think children should have the skills for dressing?

Here are some practical suggestions for making dressing routines work well for you and the children.

Handle children's bodies with respect. When you touch or pick up an infant, consider how you handle her body. Do you lift her swiftly into the air and then quickly lay her down on the diaper-changing table? Do you stop, bend beside her, smile, tell her that you are going to pick her up, let her know you need her help, and then pause and wait for her reaction before gently lifting her up? By interacting gently throughout the dressing process, you let infants, toddlers, and twos know that you respect their bodies. When lifting young infants, remember to support their heads and necks.

Talk with children about what you are doing. Use caring words and a calm voice while changing children's clothes. Describe what you are doing as you do it. "I will put your head through this part... Your arm goes in here... There it is! Your clean shirt is right on your tummy!" Be playful. Ask a toddler or 2-year-old, "Where should we put your sock? Does it go on your head? No-o-o. That's silly. It goes on your foot." Learn the words in children's home languages for common articles of clothing so you can use them as you dress or undress the child.

Be aware that children's temperaments influence the way they experience dressing. Some children have intense reactions to wet clothing or any change in the condition of their clothing. Others are more flexible and easygoing and do not seem to be bothered if their shirts are wet or sticky. Some children need you to help them move quickly through the dressing process. Others do better when you slow down and take your time. For children who are sensitive to touch and find certain textures uncomfortable, you will want to have soft, tagless, well-worn cotton clothing on hand.

Let children participate in whatever way they can. An infant may simply lift his arm when you put a shirt on him, while a 2-year-old might put a sweater on with only a little assistance. Observe how each child in your group prefers to participate, and adjust your approach to involve each child as much as possible.



Chapter 10: Getting Dressed

Keep familiar extra clothing on hand for each child. Ask families to bring clothing from home so their children can be changed when necessary during the day. Also keep an ample supply of extra clothing in your room to be shared as needed. You can ask for donations from all parents, shop at garage sales or similar places, or save leftover and forgotten clothing from year to year.

Give children choices whenever possible. Simple choices provide them with a much-needed sense of control and with practice in making decisions. You may ask mobile infants, toddlers, and twos a simple question such as, “Are you ready to go with me?” Then pause to watch for their reaction. Ask 2-year-olds more complex questions and wait for their responses: “Do you want to get dressed here by your cot or over there by your cubby?” “Do you want to wear your green socks with butterflies or the purple ones?”

Engage children with songs, fingerplays, and playful games that encourage learning and cooperation. When you dress a young infant who is lying on his back, lean slightly forward so that he can focus on your face as you sing and talk. One day you can sing a line such as, “This is the way we put on your shirt.” Substitute *pants*, *shoes*, *socks*, and *jacket* on other days. Involve toddlers and twos by asking them to help choose the game they would like to play, song to sing, or fingerplay to say as they dress. Do not hesitate to repeat favorite games, songs, and fingerplays that children enjoy. Use them as long as they help children participate or remain calm. When you find that they are not helpful, choose another strategy.

Step in to minimize frustration when a child attempts a task that might be too difficult to accomplish alone. Recognize that children are eager to help with dressing and may want to help even when a task is too difficult for them. Stay nearby and offer help as needed. When a child is becoming frustrated, be ready to offer comfort and reassurance. “Buttoning that button is tricky. May I help?” “That zipper seems to be stuck. Maybe we can get it up if both of us try.” When a child makes a mistake, offer a new way to look at the situation. For example, when a toddler or 2-year-old has put his shoes on the wrong feet, you might say, “You did it all by yourself! How do those shoes feel? If we switched them, would they feel different? Let’s try that and see.”

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