

A Parent's Guide to Teaching Toddlers to Dress Themselves

Highlights

As your child grows, they will begin to learn to dress themselves.

Dressing themselves helps build confidence and important lifelong skills.

Your child may show interest in getting dressed by taking off their clothes, such as their socks or hat.

You can help your child learn to get dressed by playing dress-up and praising their attempts to dress themselves.

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Why Should My Toddler Learn How to Dress?

Dressing and undressing are lifelong skills that start in childhood.

Learning how to put clothes and shoes on is important for your toddler's development. Being able to dress themselves can help them feel a sense of achievement, and develop their:

- confidence
- independence
- self-esteem

Learning to dress helps your child develop life skills. These include:

- decision making
- organisation
- perception
- fine and gross motor skills
- balance

Dressing also helps build language skills and body awareness. Your toddler will learn how to recognise and name:

- different items of clothing
- the colours of clothes
- where clothes go on their body

When Will My Toddler Show Interest in Dressing Themselves?

There's no set age when children become interested in learning how to dress. Your toddler may be keen to dress themselves and change multiple times a day, or they may not seem to care at all.

Most toddlers start with taking clothes and shoes off before they learn how to put them back on. They will often take off easy-to-remove articles like:

- hats
- shoes
- socks

As they get older, your child will build more complex skills, such as choosing the right clothes for the weather.

How quickly your child learns to dress themselves depends on:

how interested they are
how much practice they've had

1 year old

At around 12 months old, your child may try to help while you are dressing them. They may:

hold their arms up for tops and jumpers and push their arms through sleeves
hold their feet out for socks and shoes

They may also start taking their shoes, socks, and hats off.

2 years old

At around 2 years old, your toddler may start to:

learn to unbutton large buttons
pull their pants up and down
find the neck and armholes in tops
learn to put jackets on

3 years old

By 3 years old, look for your child to:

put on socks and shoes
zip up jackets
button-up large buttons
put on tops and t-shirts

At this age, your toddler may still need a little help from you.

How Can I Help My Toddler Learn to Dress Themselves?

Before your child can dress themselves, they must have some skills. You can help them develop these skills by giving them toys and playing games such as:

'Simon says', to learn the names of body parts
jigsaw puzzles, to practise fine motor skills needed to do up zippers and buttons

You can also introduce your child to dressing by providing dress-up clothes. Dressing-up helps your child develop dressing skills, while also being fun and creative.

Bigger, looser clothes are the easiest clothes for your child to learn with. Give your toddler clothing that is easy to get in and out of, such as elasticized pants and simple t-shirts.

Other helpful tips:

Encourage your toddler to sit on the floor while they learn to dress, to help them balance.

When your toddler is learning, give them some options of what to wear. This can help them to feel less overwhelmed, and prevent tantrums.

Give your child tops with an image on the front, to help them learn front from back.

Put clothing in a pile in the order they need to go on, with underwear at the top and pants at the bottom.

Talk your toddler through what they need to do, such as "Push your head through this hole" and so on.

Name what you see, such as, "Good job putting your arms through the sleeves."

Let your toddler do what they can, then help them with the harder tasks.

It's important not to rush your toddler - they will need time and practice to learn. If they make a mistake, let them recognise where they've gone wrong and help them fix it.

Put a mirror where your child gets dressed, so they can watch what is happening, and fix any mistakes.

Remember to praise your toddler's attempts at dressing.

Tools And Assistance

To help your toddler learn to dress themselves, here are some tools and resources you can use:

Mirrors: A mirror where your child dresses themselves will help them observe their progress and fix mistakes.

Dress-up clothes: These are great for fun, creative play while also teaching dressing skills. Opt for larger, looser clothes that are easier for your toddler to manage.

Dress-up dolls or figures: Dolls or action figures with clothes can help teach body awareness and the concept of putting clothes on a figure, which your toddler can later apply to themselves.

Simple clothing: Choose clothes with easy-to-use fasteners, like elasticized pants, zippers, large buttons, and t-shirts that are easy to put on and take off.

Puzzles: Jigsaw puzzles can help toddlers practice fine motor skills needed for tasks like zipping or buttoning.

Body part games: Games like 'Simon says' can help toddlers identify different body parts, which aids in learning how to dress themselves.