

TEACHING DRESSING SKILLS: Buttons, Bows & More

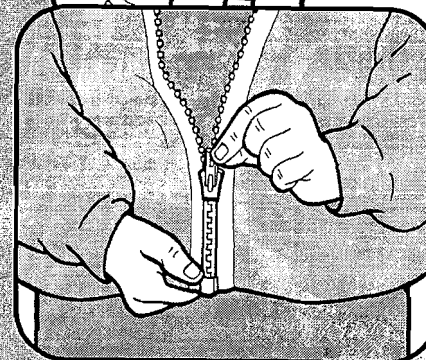
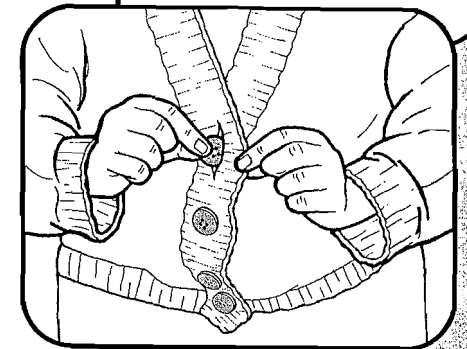
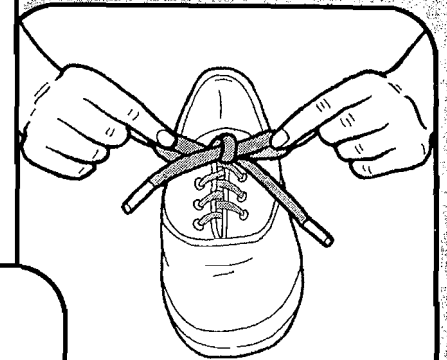
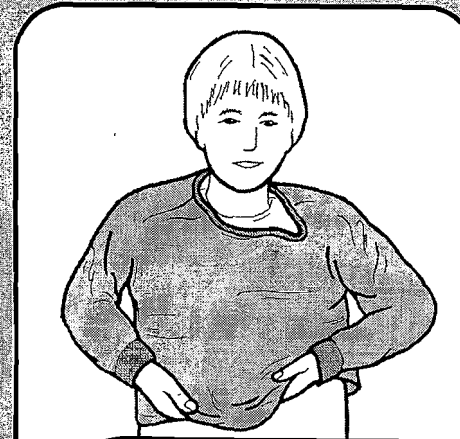
This packet contains five booklets with easy-to-follow directions and pictures for teaching children and adults of varying abilities the basic dressing skills: buttoning, zippering, shoe tying, dressing and undressing. Developed by an experienced occupational therapist, these methods have been successfully used with many children, adolescents and adults.

Each task is broken down with every step clearly illustrated and specific verbal directions given. This avoids confusion and eliminates excess verbalization that can distract the learner. The author has included the needed prerequisites for each task, many teaching tips, common errors to be avoided and useful suggestions and adaptations.

*These are the booklets parents
and teachers have been looking for!*

DRESSING SKILLS

Buttons, Bows & More



**Marcy
Coppelman
Goldsmith,
OTR, BCP**

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Marcy Coppelman Goldsmith, OTR, BCP

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Glossary of Terms

Auditory discrimination:

The ability to distinguish similarities and differences in sounds, in order to identify sounds and words correctly.

Grasp and release:

The ability to close and open the hand as needed with a degree of control.

Pincer grasp:

The ability to bring one's thumb to another finger. For ADL skills, this is most often thumb to index finger.

Refined (tip) pincer grasp:

A pincer grasp using the tips of the fingers, providing a higher degree of control.

Reverse chaining:

An instructional method in which the final step of a task is taught first, followed by the remaining steps in reverse order.

Tactile discrimination:

The ability to recognize different objects using the sense of touch, and to associate those tactile cues with particular objects.

Sensory defensiveness:

Extreme sensitivity to harmless sensations and/or the overactivation of the protective senses. A person may have defensiveness toward only one type of sensation or to many.

Visual perception:

The ability to see and understand what is seen. As a person develops, this includes concepts of distinguishing the foreground from background, up, down, front, back, inside and outside.

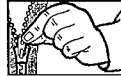
ZIPPERING

Prerequisites

There are specific skills an individual needs before they can learn all aspects of zippering a separated zipper. Usually separated zippers are on coats, sweaters and vests. A checklist is provided below for your review and the specific reason applied to zippering as to why this skill is needed. These are listed in order of importance. The majority of the skills must be achieved before beginning to learn zippering.

Does the person demonstrate:

_____ A pincer grasp with each hand to hold the zipper?



_____ Sufficient tactile discrimination and/or auditory discrimination to feel or hear when the zipper parts are fully engaged?

_____ Adequate eye contact to look at the zipper for 30 seconds to 1 minute?

_____ Adequate visual perception to distinguish the coat fabric from the zipper? To distinguish the different parts of a zipper, e.g. the zipper pin from the zipper box?

_____ Temperature regulation to tolerate being warm while learning to zipper? Practicing this task usually involves wearing clothing 10-15 minutes in a warm environment.

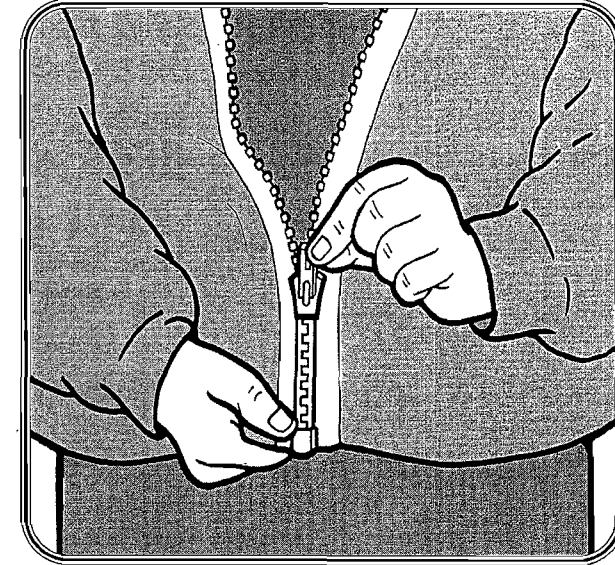
COMMON ERRORS	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
1. Person pulls up the zipper tab before the zipper teeth are fully engaged.	☛ Stop the person from pulling the tab up. Remind the person to "listen for the snap".
2. Person randomly pulls at the fabric of the coat.	☛ Provide hand over hand assistance to put the person's fingers in the proper place. Reinforce this by stating, "See, your left hand holds here (point) and your right hand holds here (point)".

Possible adaptations

1. Paint the zipper parts different colors to make it easier for the person to distinguish where to grasp. Fingernail polish works well. Avoid applying the nail polish to the zipper pin or teeth.

2. One useful decorative item is a zipper pull. This is attached to the hole in the zipper tab, making it easier to grasp. There is a Koosh ball product made especially for this, or a decorative key chain can be used. Finding key chains that interest the person, such as a Disney or super hero product increases the person's motivation.

ZIPPERING



**Marcy Coppelman
Goldsmith, OTR, BCP**



Environment

Light should be bright enough to easily see fabric and zipper.

The room should be cool, quiet and free of distractions.

Position

The trainer should be across from the person.

Instructions

- ❖ Introduce the task to be done. Keep the wording simple, such as, "It's time to zipper."
- ❖ Let the person know how long they will be practicing the task. Make sure the person understands your meaning - "4 times" may make more sense than "5 minutes".
- ❖ Demonstrate the step to be practiced.

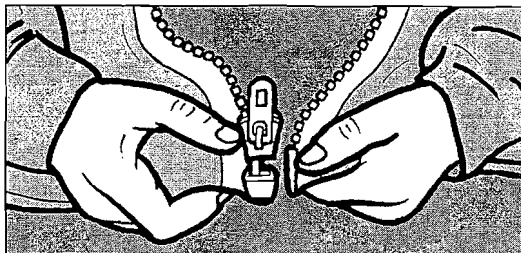
Tips

- ◆ Building confidence is crucial in the beginning. Praise the person lavishly for any successful attempts. This fosters continued motivation.
- ◆ The zipper should be in good condition and securely sewn in place.
- ◆ The coat or sweater should be roomy enough to allow the person freedom of movement of both arms.
- ◆ The length of the coat should allow the wearer to see the zipper parts clearly. This varies from person to person. Some benefit from a hip length coat and others do better with a waist length coat. Try sibling's or peer's coat to find the best coat length.
- ◆ Avoid a coat with extraneous decorative details such as strings, ruffles and unnecessary fabric.

DIRECTIONS

1

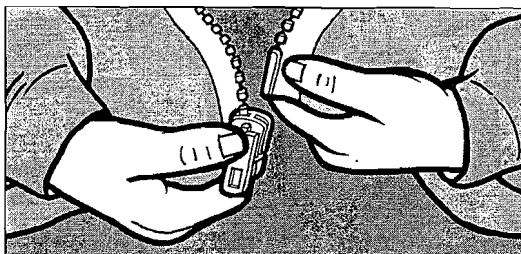
"Hold each side.
Don't let go."



Make sure the person holds each side of the garment close to the zipper teeth.

2

"Put it in.
Listen for the snap."



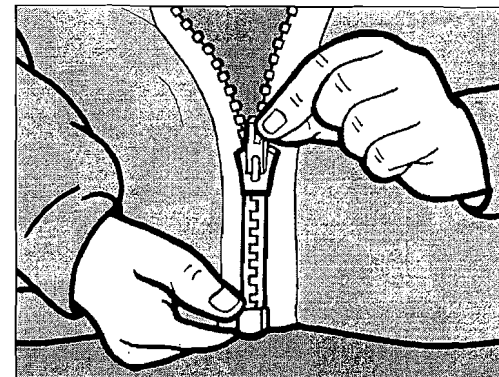
Have the person slide the pin through the slider and into the box until it clicks (snaps).

Make sure gaze is focused on the zipper box.

Keep extra fabric from blocking the person's view of the zipper.

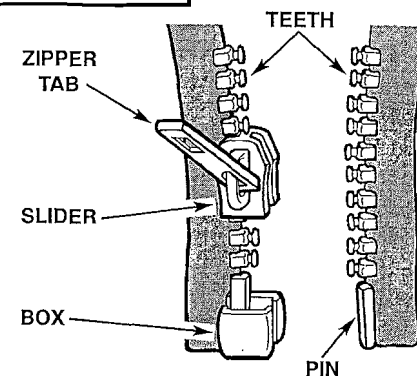
3

"Hold and pull."



The person holds onto the zipper box with one hand, and pulls the zipper tab up with the other hand.

ZIPPER PARTS



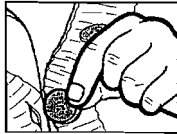
BUTTONING

Prerequisites

There are specific skills an individual needs before they can learn the task of buttoning. A checklist is provided below for your review and the specific reason applied to buttoning as to why this skill is needed. These are listed in order of importance. The majority of the skills must be achieved before beginning to learn buttoning.

Does the person demonstrate:

_____ A pincer grasp for manipulating large buttons on a stretchy fabric?



_____ A refined pincer grasp for small and medium sized buttons on a nonstretch fabric?

_____ Ability to sustain eye contact on the button and fabric?

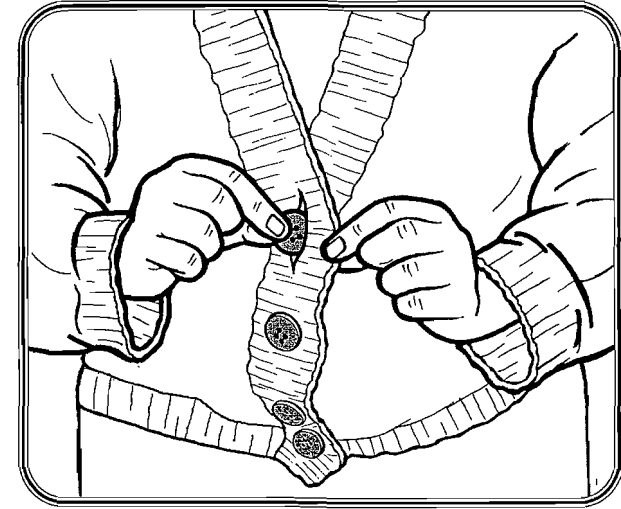
_____ Sufficient visual perception and tactile discrimination to learn to identify the button and button hole?

COMMON ERRORS	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
1. Person only completes half of the task so the button is only halfway into or out of the buttonhole.	⇒ Cue the person by saying, "push more" or "pull more".
2. Person pulls at fabric to unbutton.	⇒ Reposition the person's fingers with one hand on the button and the other on the fabric close to the buttonhole.
3. Person avoids wearing any clothing that has buttons, so practice and mastery is never needed.	⇒ Obtain clothes with buttons that include the person's favorite colors and themes. This may be TV, book or movie characters, or flowers. Behavioral programs may also be beneficial - the person can earn points or chips for wearing clothes with buttons.

Possible adaptations

1. Contrasting colored clothing may be easier for the person to see. Replace buttons or use decorative fabric painting to increase contrast around the button and buttonhole.

BUTTONING



**Marcy Coppelman
Goldsmith, OTR, BCP**

Environment

The room should be quiet and free of distractions.

Position

Sit next to the person. If the person is a child, he/she may be positioned on your lap.

Instructions

- ❖ Introduce the task to be done. Keep the wording simple, such as, "It's time to button."
- ❖ Keep verbal directions to a minimum. People who need to learn to button can easily become overwhelmed or distracted by too many instructions.
- ❖ Demonstrate how to unbutton first. Use only three words, Pinch, Poke and Push as each step is done. Practice unbuttoning until it is mastered. The trainer will need to button the article of clothing. Next teach buttoning, again using a demonstration with only three words of instruction.

Tips

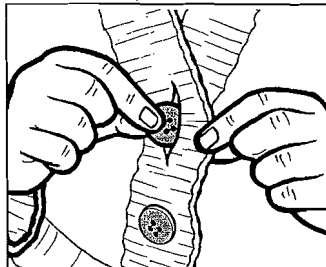
- ◆ Building confidence is crucial in the beginning. Praise the person lavishly for any successful attempts. This fosters continued motivation.
- ◆ Have the person wear the article of clothing that is to be buttoned. This keeps extra fabric out of the way, and helps the person motor plan and execute "the real thing".
- ◆ Place the person's fingers properly on the button and button hole if needed. This involves pinching the button with one hand and pinching the fabric with the other.
- ◆ Have sufficient time to practice the task, do not rush the person. The best time to practice may or may not be during the person's morning routine. It varies with how alert the person is and how much time is available.
- ◆ Redirect the person's eye contact to the buttons as needed.
- ◆ Practice with large buttons on a favorite article of clothing first. If needed, sew on new buttons of a contrasting color. Stretchy fabric, (sweater, knits), is easier than stiff fabric, (woven cloth and flannel shirts).
- ◆ Buttoning boards are not recommended because the fabric is smaller than an article of clothing and stays unnaturally flat.

DIRECTIONS: UNBUTTONING

1

"Pinch."

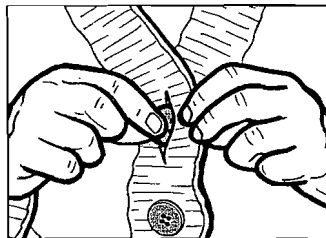
The person grasps the button with a pincer grasp. Male clothing requires using one's left hand to pinch the button, female clothing requires using one's right hand to pinch the button.



2

"Poke."

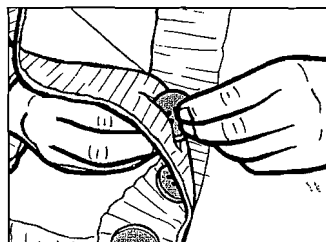
Have the person poke one edge of the grasped button through the button hole.



3

"Push."

The person pushes the button through the button hole.

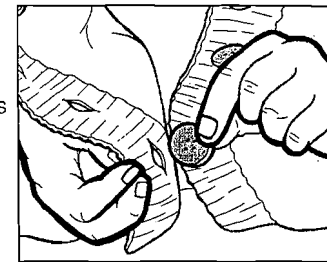


DIRECTIONS: BUTTONING

1

"Pinch."

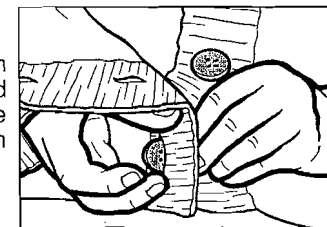
The person grasps the button with a pincer grasp.



2

"Poke."

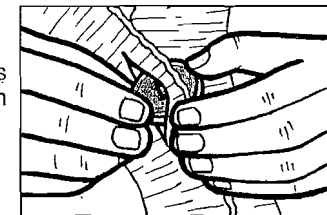
Have the person tilt the grasped button and poke one edge through the button hole.



3

"Pull."

The person pulls the entire button through the buttonhole.

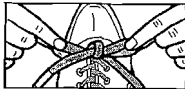


SHOE TYING

Prerequisites

There are specific skills an individual needs before they can learn the task of shoe tying. A checklist is provided below for your review and the specific reason applied to shoe tying as to why this skill is needed. These are listed in order of importance. The majority of the skills must be achieved before beginning to learn shoe tying.

Does the person demonstrate:

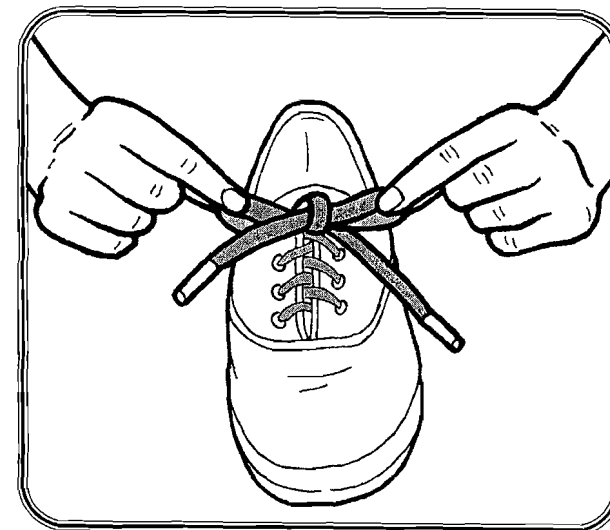
- Motivation to try the task?
- Adequate arm, spine and hip range of motion to reach their feet?
- Pincer grasp to grasp the laces? 
- Use of both hands for grasping and coordination of the laces?
- Eye contact on one's hands, shoes and laces?
- Adequate visual perception to differentiate one lace from another?
- Sufficient sitting balance and trunk strength to reach shoe laces without falling over?
- Frustration tolerance to continue to practice the steps even after a few unsuccessful attempts?

COMMON ERRORS	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
1. The trainer offers too much verbal instruction. This can distract the person, and provide more information than is needed to master or comprehend the task.	⇒ The trainer needs to limit the number of words used for instructions. Say the step number to keep the person focused.
2. The person rushes through the task, does not tie the shoes properly, and yet says, "I'm done."	⇒ Acknowledge the person's attempt, then redirect the person to try again in a step by step manner.
3. The person adds extra twists and loops to the knot in an attempt to tie the laces.	⇒ Comment on how well they are doing, but mention they are working too hard. Demonstrate again, without using many words, how to do the specific part of tying which is a problem.
4. The person talks incessantly to the trainer. The trainer engages in this conversation unrelated to shoe tying. This rewards the person for social interaction, but serves to avoid learning to tie shoes.	⇒ End the conversation as quickly as possible. Offer to finish the conversation as soon as the tying is completed.

Possible adaptations

1. Color one half of the lace (i.e.-both sides of the lace from the middle to one end) with a marker to assist the person's ability to distinguish the laces. Or use two small laces for each shoe of two different colors. Tie the laces together, with the knot at the bottom when the laces are threaded through the holes.
2. Use longer laces to increase the ease of manipulation.
3. When someone needs less words, emphasize step numbers with verbal directions, or use only the numbers.

SHOE TYING



**Marcy Coppelman
Goldsmith, OTR, BCP**

Environment

The room should be quiet and free of distractions.

Position

Sit with the person on the floor. The person's back may be against a wall if needed. Trainer sits facing the person.

The practice shoe is positioned either on the person's lap or between the legs, with the heel of the shoe closest to the body. A sensory defensive person may prefer to work with the shoe on a table.

Instructions

- ❖ Introduce the task to be done. Keep the wording simple, such as, "It's time to practice tying your shoes."
- ❖ Let the person know how long they will be practicing the task. Make sure the person understands your meaning - "4 times" may make more sense than "5 minutes".
- ❖ This method is based on reverse chaining, i.e., the last step is taught first, then the next to last step and last step, etc.... In the first session with the person, only teach Step 5. This ensures the person feels a sense of confidence and mastery.
- ❖ Demonstrate the step to be practiced.

Tips

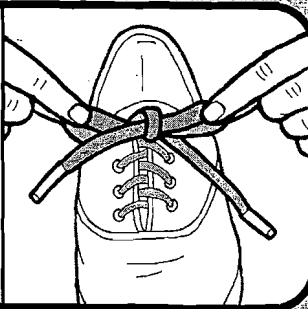
- ❖ Building confidence and motivation to learn is crucial in the beginning:
 - Praise the person lavishly for any successful attempts. This fosters continued motivation.
 - For failed attempts, give warm, neutral comments such as, "You are trying really hard!", "You are doing better at this." Then review the correct procedure. "I see that you are learning to do this by the way....." (fill in the sentence with a description of the person's performance, such as: "you are able to cross one loop over another").
- ❖ Teach only the adult style of shoe tying. Learning the "bunny loop" method and then having to learn another new method later is discouraging and confusing.
- ❖ Use a large adult shoe, for practice. Extra huge shoes are fun and easier to handle. This strategy simultaneously de-emphasizes past failures of working on their own shoe and engages the person's sense of humor.
- ❖ Shoe tying should be practiced daily. For children, the number of repetitions per day should be their age. So a seven year old will practice seven times. With adult person's, 6-10 repetitions is recommended depending on their frustration tolerance.
- ❖ Check the lace type and quality. Long, flat cotton laces are generally the easiest to tie. Round nylon ones slip through fingers and come untied easily.
- ❖ Illustrations may be colored to match the laces of the practice shoe.

DIRECTIONS

5

"Pinch and pull."

Make sure the person uses their most refined pincer grasp to pull both loops.

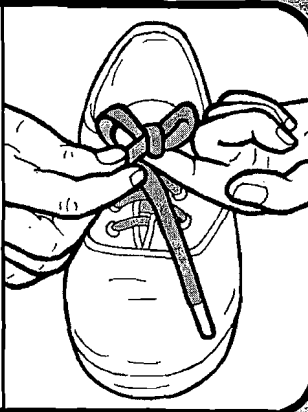


4

"Poke."

While the person is holding one loop poke the middle of the other lace through the hole to make the other loop.

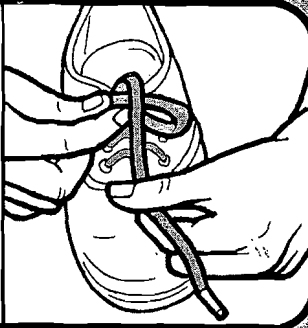
Make sure the person is looking at the laces.



3

"Put the lace over the loop."

Always lay the straight lace on top of the loop - it provides the person with the best visibility of the laces.



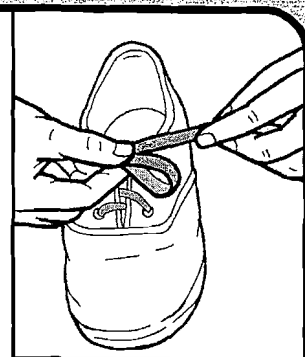
2

"Make the loop."

Make the first loop on the person's right lace. Have the person hold the loop parallel to the toe of the shoe. This is where mistakes are begun. Learning to correct the mistake is important for mastery of shoe tying.

You can break this step into two parts to make it easier:

1. The trainer makes the loop and the person holds it. Trainer says, "Hold the loop."
2. The person makes the loop and holds it. Trainer says, "Make the loop."

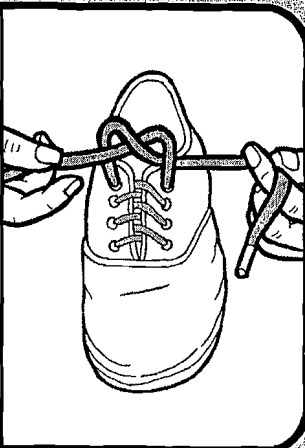


1

"Cross and pull through."

Have the person cross the two laces, putting the top lace around and through. Be consistent, always putting the right lace over the left. You can break this down further into two steps:

1. Cross the lace.
2. Poke it through.



UPPER BODY DRESSING

Prerequisites

There are specific skills an individual needs before they can learn the task of dressing their upper body. A checklist is provided below for your review and the specific reason applied to upper body dressing as to why this skill is needed. These are listed in order of importance. The majority of the skills must be achieved before beginning.

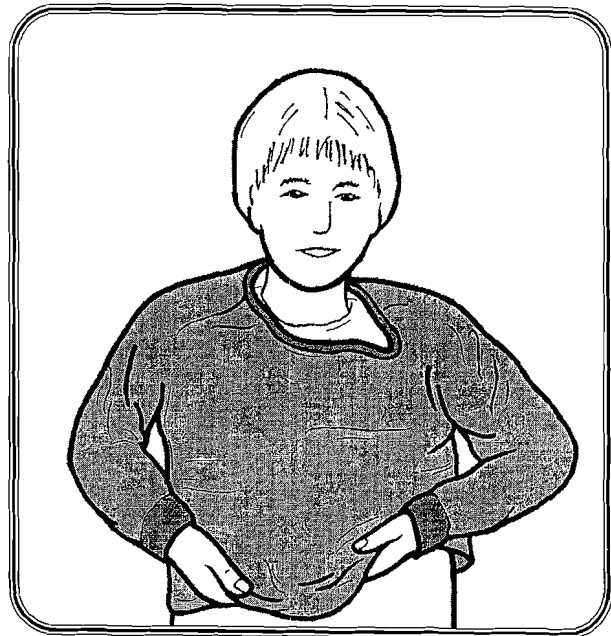
- Does the person demonstrate:
- _____ A grasp and release in at least one hand?
 - _____ An interest in and desire for independence?
 - _____ Tolerance to having his/her face covered?
 - _____ Tolerance of the feeling of the clothing; i.e. sensory defensiveness does not interfere with clothing changes?
 - _____ An understanding of an activity with more than one step?
 - _____ Enough flexibility to raise arms to head level and above?

Undressing	
COMMON ERRORS	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
1. Person tries to pull shirt over the head first, then gets stuck and frustrated.	⇒ Have the person pull their arms out first.
2. Person enjoys having vision occluded, starts to play and becomes distracted.	⇒ Provide hand over hand assistance to keep the person focused on the task.
Dressing	
COMMON ERRORS	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
1. Person puts arms in first, cannot see, and is not able to proceed with task.	⇒ Hold the shirt ready, so the first step is clearly to put in the head. Provide assistance in all practice sessions until the person understands the routine.
2. Person is unable to find arm holes, gets frustrated and gives up.	⇒ Help guide the person's hands to the arm holes. Continue this assistance until the person understands the task. Try using tank tops during this period of learning.

Possible adaptations

1. Write the person's name on the inside bottom edge in the front to help with orientation of the shirt.
2. Use tank tops at first if the person needs the task simplified.
3. If the person has limited range of motion:
 - when putting on a shirt, have the person put the most limited arm in first.
 - when taking off a shirt, the most limited arm should be removed last.

UPPER BODY DRESSING



Marcy Coppelman Goldsmith, OTR, BCP

Environment

Should preserve the person's privacy.

Position

Either seated or standing. When dressing, hold the clothing in proper orientation, ready for the person to put it on correctly.

Instructions

❖ Introduce the task to be done. Keep the wording simple, such as, "It's time to practice dressing!"

❖ Let the person know how long they will be practicing the task. Make sure the person understands your meaning - "4 times" may make more sense than "5 minutes".

Tips

◆ Building confidence is crucial in the beginning. Praise the person lavishly for any successful attempts. This fosters continued motivation.

◆ Make sure the neck opening of the garment is large and stretchy enough for easy on and easy off. Start with knit tops, either T-shirts or 1-3 button styles.

◆ Practice with the person's favorite clothes.

◆ T-shirts with pictures, logos or buttons make it easier to tell front from back.

DIRECTIONS: UNDRESSING

1

"Pull your arm out."

Have the person pull the first arm out of its sleeve, while using their other hand to hold the upper sleeve fabric.



2

"Now pull your other arm out."

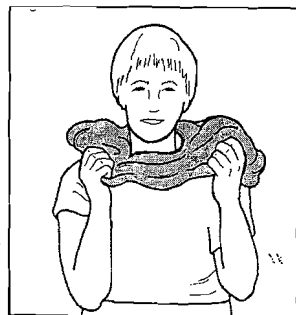
Person pulls other arm out, using free arm to hold the shirt away from the body.



3

"Pull up and over."

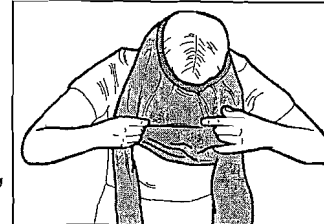
Make sure the person uses both hands to pull the shirt up and over their head.



DIRECTIONS: DRESSING

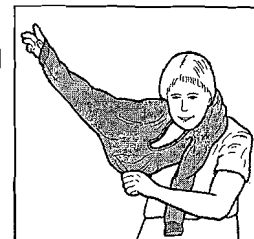
1

"Put your head in the hole. Pull down."



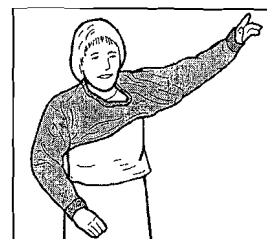
2

"Put one hand in."



3

"Put other hand in."



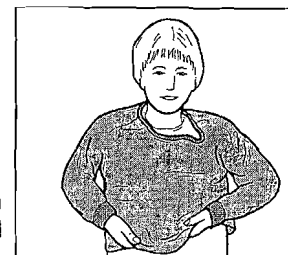
Person may have trouble finding sleeve entrance. Encourage them to, **"Keep feeling for it."**

4

"Pull down. Fix it."

Make sure the person has a well placed, good grip on the fabric.

Use the second sentence, **"Fix it"** to remind the person to finish adjusting the shirt.



LOWER BODY DRESSING

Prerequisites

There are specific skills an individual needs before they can learn the task of dressing their lower body. A checklist is provided below for your review and the specific reason applied to lower body dressing as to why this skill is needed. These are listed in order of importance. The majority of the skills must be achieved before beginning.

Does the person demonstrate:

- _____ A grasp and release in at least one hand?
- _____ An interest in and desire for independence?
- _____ Enough flexibility in their trunk or body to touch his/her toes, either from a standing or seated position?
- _____ Frustration tolerance if success is not immediate?
- _____ Tolerance of the feeling of the clothing; i.e. sensory defensiveness does not interfere with clothing changes?

Undressing	
COMMON ERRORS	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
1. Person tries to pull down pants without releasing fasteners.	☛ Stop the person from doing this. Say, "First you must undo the button (zipper, etc.)."
2. Person is not aware of needing to get clothing completely off feet.	☛ Stop the person. Have the person look at and feel the clothing on their feet.
Dressing	
COMMON ERRORS	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
1. Person has no interest in wearing clothing. Person does not like the feeling of the fabric.	☛ Under a therapist's direction, try the Wilbarger deep pressure protocol. ☛ Try a behavioral approach to earn chips or points for keeping clothes on.
2. Person is easily frustrated when two legs are in just one pant leg.	☛ Have the person look at and feel the two pant legs. Make sure the lighting is bright enough to easily see the pants.

Possible adaptations

1. Have the person sit on the floor, with their back against the wall for more stability if needed. Instruct the person to lift first one buttock to pull the pants up to their waist. Then lift the other buttock and pull.
2. Try shorts first. There is less fabric to contend with, minimizing time spent in an unsteady position.

LOWER BODY DRESSING



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Environment

Should preserve the person's privacy.

Position

Sitting down on a chair.

When teaching undressing, make sure any fasteners are undone before beginning.

Instructions

- ❖ Introduce the task to be done. Keep the wording simple, such as, "It's time to practice dressing!"
- ❖ Let the person know how long they will be practicing the task. Make sure the person understands your meaning - "4 times" may make more sense than "5 minutes".

Tips

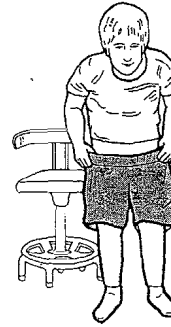
- ❖ Building confidence is crucial in the beginning. Praise the person lavishly for any successful attempts. This fosters continued motivation.
- ❖ Clothing should be loose to minimize pulling and tugging. Person should learn first with elastic waist pants.
- ❖ Practice with the person's favorite clothes.
- ❖ When putting on pants after toileting, be sure to do underpants and pants separately, to decrease disheveled appearance.
- ❖ Teach undressing before teaching dressing.

DIRECTIONS: UNDRRESSING

1

**"Stand up.
Push pants down."**

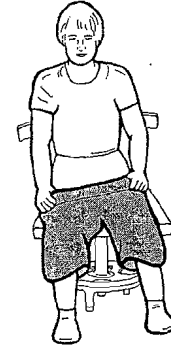
Make sure person's thumbs are inside the waistband. Watch person's balance as they begin to bend.



2

**"Sit down.
Keep pushing."**

Have person push pants to ankles.



3

**"Kick them
off."**

Alternately, pants can be removed by pulling off with hands grasping bottom of pants legs.



DIRECTIONS: DRESSING

1

**"Hold your
pants."**

Have person hold garment on the waistband, by the side seams, with thumbs inside the pants.



2

**"Put one
foot in."**



Even though the person is seated, trainer should watch balance while person puts legs in pants.

3

**"Put other
foot in."**



4

**"Stand up.
Pull it up."**

Cue the person, if necessary, to hold onto back of the pants in order to fully pull them up. Person should be encouraged to complete the task, as back of pants are often forgotten.

