

## **Sensory Strategies to Improve Independence with Dressing**

Every person has different sensory preferences in our everyday lives. Some of us like a very calm environment, warm baths, listening to music, soft textures, or to eat sweet foods. We even have sensory preferences when it comes to dressing. There are various clothing textures that can bother children when it comes to dressing.

### **Seams and tags**

- Sometimes the feeling of seams can be uncomfortable for children and children can have tactile sensitivities. One way to help with this is by finding clothes that are seamless.
- Tags can be very bothersome for some children.
- Figure out what types of textures of clothes your child likes and stick with that so that they can feel safe and become less anxious with dressing.
- Binding in the clothes (elastic waist bands, overlapping clothes)

### **Loose Clothes or Tight Clothes**

- Some children do not like the feeling of loose clothes and may prefer tighter clothes and vice versa.
- Compression shirts can be helpful if your child prefers tight clothing or if they find it calming  
<https://jettproof.co.uk/>

### **Stiff Clothing (like jeans)**

- Some children have a very hard time being able to wear jeans. Try to find trousers that they enjoy wearing. If they need to wear jeans for an occasion, then try to find jeans with a soft/stretchy texture.
- You could try stretchy elastic waist jeans

### **Hats and Shoes**

- Some children can be bothered by clothing that could touch their head. Be aware of this with your child and notice if hats/hoods really bother them.
- Shoes can be something that your child might have a hard time with. Some children prefer closed toes shoes or open toe shoes. Try to find shoes that allow your child to be independent with dressing. If they become frustrated with tying their shoes, try elastic shoe laces or Velcro shoes. Maybe your child would like light up shoes for fun!

<https://uk.hickies.eu/> alternative to laces

<https://www.greeper.com/> alternative to laces

<https://www.vivobarefoot.com/uk> shoes that give a barefoot feeling

## **Weight of the clothing** (heavy clothes vs. light clothes).

- Pay attention to the time of year is your child more bothered by heavy winter clothes or light summer clothes? Is there a way you can take away layers or add layers in textures of clothes that your child still prefers?
- When children are bothered by the feeling of their clothes they may constantly tug or pull at their clothes. They may have difficulty needing to change clothes throughout the day such as for swimming lessons or after getting dirty. If your child does become bothered by changing clothes, try to limit the number of times they will need to change their clothes. Also shopping for new clothes may cause a lot of stress. See if you can do more shopping online where they have free returns so you don't have to cause too much stress for your family.

## **Visual preferences in the clothing**

- Some children prefer a certain colour, numbers or letters, or character on their clothes. Find out if there is a certain thing that your child prefers and figure out if they would be more willing to be more independent with dressing with that preferred item of clothing. For example, a child might love the Ninja Turtles, find some Ninja Turtles clothes that they could wear every day to help them be more independent with dressing.

## **Finding clothes in their closet or drawer maybe difficult or cause them stress**

- Set them up for success with either having the clothes laid out for them or in a location in their room where they can easily access the clothes to put them on every day.

## **Auditory**

- Clothing noises (e.g. buckles, sequins or sparkles)
- Some children can become very bothered by the different sounds clothing can make such as buckles rubbing together or sequins/sparkles on a shirt rubbing together. If that is bothersome for your child, try to avoid those types of clothing.
- Sounds of items in the pockets of their trousers or coats

## **Strategies**

- Find the texture of clothes that your child prefers and avoid ones that your child really does not like
- If they need to wear a certain type of fabric they do not like, try having them wear a clothing texture they do like under the clothes so their body does not have to feel the texture they don't like.
- If needed, the child can wear clothing inside out so they do not feel the seams.
- Try warming up the clothes in the dryer/radiator before needing to get dressed if your child prefers warm feelings.
- You may try washing clothes multiple times to make it more soft.
- Set up the environment for success by setting out the clothes for them or making sure they are easily accessible in their room for them to get dressed more independently. You can

also try labelling the drawers or organising their cupboard with specific types of clothing in certain areas to make it easier for them to find the different types of clothes.

- Use hooks or hangers at eye level for the child to be able to visually see all of the items.
- Provide a visual checklist of each step of dressing to help the child visually see how to get dressed.
- Provide a rewards chart with stickers for your child to visually see a reward they can work towards with getting dressed independently every day.
- If your child likes music, try playing music while getting dressed.
- Make up a silly song about getting dressed and sing it together while your child is getting dressed.
- Use a mirror to help your child visually see how they are getting dressed.
- You can model the behaviour you want with them when it comes to getting dressed so they can visually see how to put that item of clothing on.
- Allow for extra time in the morning and night to allow your child to practice each skill and become more independent. That way you don't feel so rushed. If it is hard to have extra time in the morning, make it a priority to practice the dressing skills at night when you aren't feeling rushed to leave in the morning.
- Before getting dressed in the morning or before bed, talk about the dressing process and tell them the exact steps that need to be accomplished so they know the routine.
- Try calming activities before getting dressed e.g. a massage
- Complete deep pressure or heavy work activities before getting dressed such as squeezes, jumping on the trampoline, crab walk, or bear crawl.

<https://www.sensorysmart.co.uk/> offer a range of clothing solutions for children sensitivities to seams, labels, fabrics and textures.

<https://www.spectrasensoryclothing.co.uk/> ASD friendly clothing range

<https://www.marksandspencer.com//kids/easy-dressing> Easy Dressing range

<https://specialkids.company/collections/back-to-school> school uniforms