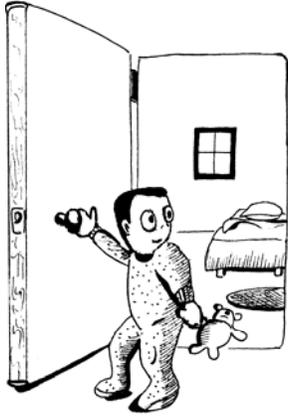


HANDLING SLOW DRESSERS



Around the age of two, most children begin to show some interest in dressing themselves. They may be able to do simple tasks like taking off socks or a coat. As children get older, they become able to take on more and more dressing tasks. By five years of age, most children are able to dress themselves completely, with the exception of tying shoelaces.

Some children take more time than necessary getting dressed. This does not include children who have simply not mastered the skills necessary to dress themselves completely. Some children poke and

stall for other reasons. This can be very frustrating for parents, especially when slow dressers disrupt the schedule of the rest of the household. Here are some things parents can do to help their children develop good dressing habits.

Preventing the Problem

The most effective way for parents to deal with dressing problems is to take steps to prevent them. Parents should start early, teaching good habits as soon as their children begin to show an interest in dressing themselves. Here are some tips:

***Provide praise and encouragement.** Parents should reward their children's appropriate dressing behavior with praise. Praise must be specific to be effective. For example, "You put on your pants all by yourself. That's great!" Praise is a great way to motivate children. Parents should encourage their children, too, to master new dressing skills, but they should make sure they let their children take the lead. Parents should try not to rush their children, or they may end up discouraging the behaviors they're trying to encourage.

***Set a good example.** Parents shouldn't expect their children to get ready on time every morning if they themselves can't do the same. Children learn by watching their parents. Parents should try to set a morning schedule for themselves and stick to it.

***Check on children periodically while they're dressing to offer praise and/or assistance.** Parents shouldn't wait until their children are completely dressed to praise them.

***Allow enough time for children to get ready.** It takes children more time to get dressed than adults. Parents should make sure their children have adequate time. Parents shouldn't expect their children to be able to rush.

***Lay out children's clothes the night before.** This will save parents and their children a lot of time each morning.

***Provide clothes that are easy to put on.** Many young children have trouble with small buttons, hooks, and clasps. Clothes that can be easily pulled on and off will make dressing a lot easier for children.

***Let children help decide what they wear.** Parents should limit choices to two or three outfits that are acceptable to them. Parents can say, for example, "Would you like to wear the blue dress or the red dress today?"

***Make dressing fun.** From the very beginning, while their children are still infants, parents should help make dressing fun for their children. Instead of treating dressing as a chore and trying to get it over with as soon as possible, parents should treat dressing time as a special time. Parents can sing and talk to their children, play naming games, etc.

***Don't rush or nag children.** Remember, it takes children quite a bit longer to dress themselves than adults. Children who are rushed or nagged will quickly become frustrated, and may refuse to cooperate. If their children are clearly dawdling, it is best for parents to say nothing and let their children suffer the consequences if they're late. This way children will learn that it's their responsibility to dress themselves on time each morning.

***Try parallel dressing.** This means parents getting dressed with their children. Parallel dressing will allow parents to show their children by example how to put on shirts, pants, etc.

***Practice.** Parents should practice new dressing skills with their children (for example, tying shoelaces) when there is no hurry.

Solving the Problem

Some children poke and stall no matter how much their parents try to prevent it. When this happens, there are steps that can be taken to minimize the problem once it has developed.

***Establish a morning routine.** It is usually best if getting dressed is the first activity of the day. All other activities should not be allowed until after children are completely dressed. Example: 7:00 a.m. - Get up, get cleaned up, and get dressed. Allow at least 20-30 minutes to get dressed. 7:30 - Breakfast. 7:45 - Leave for school or day care. If children finish getting dressed before breakfast time, parents can allow their children to spend the extra time doing some fun activity like playing or watching television.

The same goes if children finish breakfast before it's time to leave for school or day care. It is very important that parents consistently stick to the morning schedule. Parents should leave for school at the designated time regardless of whether or not their children have finished breakfast.

***All dressing should be done in the children's bedroom, and children should not be allowed to leave their bedrooms until they are completely dressed.**

***Play beat the clock.** When their children awaken in the morning, parents can set a timer for 20-30 minutes - however much time they have determined their children need to dress themselves. Parents should then challenge their children to get dressed before the timer goes off. Parents can keep a chart of their children's progress, allowing their children to place a star or something similar on the chart each day they beat the clock. Parents should help their children set weekly goals (for example, beat the clock three out of five days per week), and provide some type of a reward (for example, a trip to the park) if the goal is reached.

***Require children to be dressed before sitting down for breakfast.**

This way, if they do not meet their schedule, the logical consequence would be missing breakfast. It may seem harsh to send children to school without breakfast. However, this will only have to be done a couple of times before children get the message that they are to get dressed on time or face the consequences.

***Let children experience the logical consequences for their actions.**

If children dawdle and as a result run the risk of being late to school, parents shouldn't interfere. Parents should let their children suffer the logical consequences of walking into class late, perhaps having to stay after school, and/or missing out on an assignment. Children don't like to be late. They don't like to miss out on things. Once children suffer the consequences of their behavior, they will quickly learn the connection between getting dressed on time and getting to school on time.

Finally, whether parents are teaching their children appropriate dressing behaviors, or trying to correct bad habits that have developed, it is important to be consistent. Parents should make

sure that rules and schedules are enforced each day and that discipline is consistent. Parents should try not to give in to their dawdling children's demands, such as helping them get ready in a rush, or allowing them to have breakfast even though they have missed breakfast time. Parents should remain calm, and try not to argue with their children. In time, children will learn that it's their responsibility to get themselves dressed each day.



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