

Your Child's



Dressing Workbook

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Dressing Workbook: The Backward Chaining Strategy

Welcome to your child's dressing workbook. The workbook will guide you as you teach your child dressing skills using backward chaining. It will also give you a place to chart your child's progress along the way. The workbook is broken down into the following areas:

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BACKWARD CHAINING - *INSTRUCTIONS

Suppose that you were in a race that had no rules - just a finish line and a starter to say "Go." Suppose, also, that you wanted to guarantee your success in winning that race. What would you do? After considering the possibilities, it is likely that you would decide to start the race right next to the finish line. Then, as soon as the starter said, "Go," you would be finished - and successful. Why not? There were no rules, right? Right.

Backward chaining views the teaching of a real skill much like the running of the unusual race just described, except that your child is the runner and putting on a piece of clothing is the finish line. The best way to guarantee success is to start right next to the finish line or, in other words, near the completion of the task. Then, as soon as the race begins, your child will only have a short distance to go before reaching the finish line, and experiencing success.

Backward chaining is used for teaching dressing skills by breaking them down into steps, which are always performed in the same order. For example, putting on pants can be taught using this technique. First, the dressing task is broken down into small, manageable steps. (Your child's occupational therapist can help you with this and may recommend positioning and/or adapted dressing techniques based on your child's abilities.)

1. Pick up pants by waistband
2. Lower pants and lift up leg
3. Put left leg into pant hole
4. Put right leg into pant hole
5. Pull pants up to knees
6. Stand and pull pants to waist

Now, what is the finish line when your child is putting on pants? Step 6!! Standing and pulling pants to the waist. Step 6 is the closest to the completion of the task. So, to start your child as close to the finish as possible, what do you do? You do Steps 1,2,3,4 and 5. You may have to help your child hold the pants too, so that when you say, "go," your child can pull the pants up; and complete the task quickly and easily. The race would be won.

In reality, however, the race cannot remain such a simple one forever. We want to make the strategy of backward chaining useful for teaching more than just the ends of skills. You have begun by doing practically the entire task, requiring your child to do only a little to complete the task. You will continue by doing just a little less for your child each time, moving the starting line a little farther from the finish line until you eventually get to the beginning

*Adapted from Baker, B. L., & Brightman, A. J. (1997). *Steps to Independence: Teaching Everyday Skills to Children with Special Needs*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

BACKWARD CHAINING - AN EXAMPLE

Let's return to our six-step program for putting on pants, and use backward chaining. Here is the program that you will be using with your child:

First Step:

With your child sitting or in another comfortable position, put the pants on both feet, and then have your child stand up. Pull the pants up to your child's knees. Then place your child's hands on the side of the pants with your child's thumbs inside the waistband. Say, "Pull your pants up," and guide your child with your hands to pull the pants up to the waist. Then say, "Good, you pulled your pants up!"

Second Step (once first step is learned):

You put your child's pants on up to the ankles. Place your child's hands on the sides of the pants with your child's thumbs inside the waistband, saying, "Pull your pants up." Guide your child with your hands to pull the pants up to the knees. Then allow your child to finish pulling the pants up to the waist. Say, "Good! You pulled your pants up!"

Third Step (once first and second steps are learned):

Sit beside your child and put the pants on the left leg for him/her. Place your child's hands on the pants and, with your hands on your child's, say, "Put your pants on." Guide your child in putting the pants on the right leg. Have your child stand up and finish putting on the pants without assistance.

Fourth Step (once the first three are learned):

Sit beside your child and lift his/her left leg. Place your child's hands on the pants and say "Put your pants on." Then allow your child to finish putting both legs into the pants and pull them to his/her waist.

Fifth Step (once the first four are learned):

With your child's sitting, place his/her hands on the pants, allow your child to lower the pants and lift the left leg. Then say, "Put your pants on." Remove your hands and your child can now finish putting on the pants.

Sixth Step (once the first five are learned):

With your child sitting, hand the pants to him/her and then say, "Put your pants on." Allow your child to hold the pants, lower them to put both legs in, and stand to pull them to the waist. When this step has been mastered, your child will be able to put pants on without assistance once you hand them to him/her.

TIPS FOR TEACHING DRESSING SKILLS

In General:

- ✧ Undressing is an easier skill to learn than dressing.
- ✧ Loose-fitting clothing is easier to manage than tight fitting clothing. Try tighter fitting clothing once your child is confident putting on loose fitting clothing.
- ✧ Try to be consistent with the dressing task. For example, encourage your child to start with the same side of the body each time.
- ✧ Try to work on dressing at the same time each day, during your child's daily routine.
- ✧ Leave extra time so your child does not feel rushed.
- ✧ Try to work on dressing in the same location.
- ✧ Try to minimize distractions and interruptions.
- ✧ Remember to end each session with a success and praise your child's efforts.

With Pants:

- ✧ Try practicing with shorts first.
- ✧ If pants/shorts have a button, snap or zipper, fasten them for your child.

With Shirt/Jacket:

- ✧ Begin with a short sleeve shirt which is easier for your child to manage.
- ✧ If your child is struggling, talk to his/her occupational therapist about other ways to put on shirts and jackets (e.g., flip method)

With Shoes:

- ✧ It is easier to start out with slip-on or velcro shoes to eliminate the need for your child to manage shoe laces.
- ✧ If shoes have laces, teach your child to loosen the laces and pull the tongue back before putting them on.
- ✧ There are excellent books available that can help to teach your child shoelace tying (e.g. *Red Lace, Yellow Lace, Learn to Tie Your Shoes* by Mike Cacey, 1996)

HOW TO FILL IN THE PROGRESS CHARTS

To make it easier to track your child's progress, we recommend that you use copies of the chart found at the end of the workbook. By keeping track of your child's progress, you will be able to look back and see how much his/her dressing skills have improved! Following are the instructions on how to fill in the chart:

1. Fill in the Step Description for the dressing task you have chosen.
2. For each day of the week there are two columns for the morning (AM) and two columns for the evening (PM). Try to practice dressing skills with your child at least once per day as part of his/her daily dressing routine.
3. For each time of day (AM or PM) there is a 'Step Number' column and a 'Level of Assistance' column.
4. The 'Step Number' column is for you to record the number of the step that your child is working on. It is the step that your child is currently learning.
For example, if your child has completed Step 1 and Step 2 but is learning Step 3 of putting on pants. If you are working on the task in the morning, you would place the '3' in the 'Step Number' column for the AM.
5. The 'Level of Assistance' column is to mark down the highest level of assistance that was required for the step that your child is working on.
For example, if your child is working on Step 3 and he required "talking and showing" to complete the step, then you would place a 'B' under the heading 'Level of Assistance'. (The letters associated with the Levels of Assistance are found on the Progress Chart)
6. Fill in NOTES with any comments that you have or any question that you want to remember for your child's next visit with his/her occupational therapist.

LEVELS OF ASSISTANCE

On the next page are definitions for the Levels of Assistance you will provide your child while using backward chaining.

The first level is the maximum amount of help (A. Helping Only), which is where you will want to begin backward chaining. You will move down through the levels until you reach the minimum amount of help (E. Talking only). By following these levels of assistance, you are providing your child with the right amount of support they will need in order to be successful.

The amount of time you spend at each level will depend on your child. Many things can affect your child's performance and as a result their performance in the dressing task. You will need to monitor how they are doing, and do less for them when you feel they are ready. Following are some tips on how you will know when to decrease the amount of help you provide.

TIPS FOR ADJUSTING YOUR LEVEL OF ASSISTANCE

- ✧ As your child becomes more familiar with the step of a task, gradually reduce your assistance.
- ✧ Let your child take more and more responsibility for performing the task alone.
- ✧ If your child can perform the step and you are helping by talking only, your child is ready for the next step.
- ✧ If you still need to help or show your child the step, he/she is probably not quite ready for the next step.

DEFINITIONS OF LEVELS OF ASSISTANCE

1. Helping only

This is doing the step with your child, hand over hand. For example, you help your child to pull up the pants by holding your child's hands and pulling up the pants to his/her waist.

2. Talking & Helping

This is telling your child what to do and doing the step with your child. For example, you told your child to pull the pants up to the waist and you helped to pull the pants up. Helping may involve holding your child's hands and moving your child through the motions.

3. Talking & Showing

This is telling your child what to do and demonstrating what you would like him/her to do alone. For example, you told your child to pull up the pants to his/her waist and you showed how you pull up your own pants to your waist.

4. Talking & Pointing

This is telling your child what to do and pointing to something that shows him/her what you are talking about. For example, you told your child to pull up the pants to the waist and you pointed to his/her waist.

5. Talking Only

This is telling your child clearly and simply what to do. For example, you told your child to pull his/her pants up to the waist.

COMMON DRESSING TASKS BROKEN DOWN INTO STEPS

Steps for putting on a pull-over/t-shirt

1. Pull shirt over head
2. Push right arm up through right sleeve
3. Push left arm up through left sleeve
4. Pull shirt down to waist

Steps for putting on socks (while sitting)

1. Hold sock by edge with both hands
2. Push toes into sock
3. Lift foot and pull sock over heel
4. Pull sock up leg

Steps for putting on a jacket

1. Pull jacket onto right shoulder
2. Slip right arm up through right arm hole
3. Reach with left arm to pull jacket around
4. Pull jacket onto left shoulder with right hand
5. Hold collar of jacket with right arm
6. Push left arm through left arm hole

Steps for putting on pants

1. Hold pants by waistband
2. Lower pants and lift left leg
3. Put left leg into pant hole
4. Put right leg into pant hole
5. Pull pants up to knees
6. Stand and pull pants to waist

✧ Using the left and right side of the body may be switched depending on your child's abilities.
✧ You will want to have your child use his/her strongest arm/leg to dress the other arm/leg first.

Backward Chaining Progress Chart

Page One

Dressing Task: _____

Step Number	Step Description
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

Levels of Assistance

Letter	Level of Assistance
A	Helping Only
B	Talking and helping
C	Talking and showing
D	Talking and pointing
E	Talking only

Backward Chaining Progress Chart

Page Two

Dressing Task: _____

Week of: _____	Step Number AM	Level of Assistance AM	Step Number PM	Level of Assistance PM
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Notes: _____

FEEDBACK

This tool has been developed to help children learn the skill of dressing. We wanted to make it easy to understand and follow. If you have any suggestions for us we would love to hear from you!

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