



## Dressing: Teaching Buttons

Many skills are involved in buttoning a shirt. Both hands need to work together in a coordinated manner while performing different movements. Most buttons are small and require a good pincer grasp to hold the edge of the button; arch development of the hand and intrinsic muscle strength to push it through the buttonhole while the other hand has to hold the buttonhole steady. Buttoning requires sequencing, motor planning and problem solving. If a child has difficulty with any of these skills, buttoning will be challenging.

### Tips for teaching buttoning:

- Practice unbuttoning first.
- Backward Chaining: Encourage success in buttoning by starting with the last step. Work on just this last step with your child until they have mastered it. Then, work on the previous step. Gradually, add more steps until they are able to complete the whole process. Backward chaining encourages self-confidence and success in learning new skills.
- Practice buttoning from bottom to top. The child will have more room to work and a better view of the buttons at the bottom of a shirt.
- Practice buttoning with a shirt on a table so the child can see what their hands are doing.
- Larger buttons are easier to manipulate
- Practice buttoning with shirts that are not visually distracting. Use a white shirt with coloured buttons. You can also add a dot of paint/nail varnish on white buttons to make them stand out.
- Iron the buttonhole edges of the shirt for a more even work surface.
- Practice with a jacket that is made with a thicker material, like corduroy.
- Use the prompts “Pinch” to hold the button; “Poke” to place in the buttonhole; and “Push” to push through the hole.

### Activities:

- Work on the fine motor skills needed to button by pushing coins into a piggy bank.
- Cut a slit in felt and push a coin through the felt.
- Cut a slit in cardboard and push the buttons through. Later try with tissue paper.
- Hold coins or buttons on the edge and press them into play dough so they are standing on their edge.
- Thread beads onto pipe cleaners.

