Dressing: Teaching Zips

Many skills are involved in operating a zip. Both hands need to work together in a coordinated manner while performing and doing different movements. Most zip fastenings are small and require a good pincer grasp to hold the clasp and pull it all the way up the zipper; fighting against friction and gravity. Zips require sequencing, bilateral integration, motor planning, grading pressure or strength and problem solving. If a child has difficulty with any of these skills, zips will be challenging.

Tips for teaching zips:

- Practice unzipping first.
- Backward Chaining: Encourage success in zipping by starting with the last step; pulling the zipper to the top. 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 zipping from top to bottom. The child will have gravity on their side and a better view of the zip at the top of a jacket.
- Practice connecting the zip and zipper with a jacket on a table or yourself so the child can see what their hands are doing.
- Larger zips are easier to manipulate
- Use the prompts “Pinch” to hold the zip/clasp; “slide” to place in the zip into the zipper; “hold” to keep the zipper firm at the bottom and “Pull” to move the zip up the garment.

Activities:

- Work on the fine motor skills needed for zips, such as ones that require one hand to stay steady and one hand to move- such as cutting straight lines or tearing paper into strips.
- Posting small coins into a thin slit in a piggy bank or box (mimicking sliding zip into zipper)
- Playing dress up so that skills can be practiced with no time pressure.
- Threading tasks mimic holding the zipper steady whilst pulling the zip up- practice one hand being kept stable and one pulling the thread all the easy through in an upwards motion.