

Helping My Sensory Needs

Everyday situations:

Wearing Clothes



Some children find the sensation of clothing upsetting and distracting and so take their clothing off, making it challenging for school or leaving the home. Some people have increased sensitivity to clothing textures, so their brain keeps receiving signals from the skin about the clothing texture, rather than ignoring this so they can focus on other things.

Removing clothing can be a difficult behaviour to manage, particularly as children get older.

These children need their parents/carers and teachers to understand why wearing clothes is difficult for them, if they have extra sensory sensitivities. They also need support from the following strategies.

Find out what clothing they do like:

Explore different types of clothing, and take them to the shops to feel different textures.

Do they like:

- Soft, felt, cotton or fluffy fabrics.
- Silky, smooth, soft fabrics.
- Bumpy, corduroy, soft fabrics.
- Loose fitting light clothing.
- Tight fitting spandex/lycra smooth clothing gives a consistent, snug feeling.

- Cotton is a good for those who struggle to regulate their temperature.
- Patterned clothing may have more stitching on the inside and feel more 'scratchy'.
- Second-hand clothing that has been washed before can often be softer than new clothing.

Adapting clothing they already have:

- Remove tags, not just with scissors but unpicking the sewing so there are no rough edges left.
- Try gluing or sewing a patch of soft preferred fabric, over the tag or seam.

Treat Clothes in the Laundry:

- Non-bio washing detergent is better for sensitive skin.
- Be mindful of the scent of the washing detergent/fabric softener - try unscented products if your child is sensitive to smells.
- Wash and rewash and rewash many times with a lot of liquid fabric softener, also try to soak clothes for days / multiple times to reduce the rough textures.



Help them feel in control:

- Choose clothes together at the shops, with colours or themes of toys they like.
- If they always pick certain items of clothing (i.e. the same t-shirt), buy multiples of this and remember the material and fit.
- Have them help you wash the clothes and dry them, so they feel more involved.
- Help them choose which clothes they want to wear. If choosing is too tricky, give them two options to point at, e.g. 'red socks or blue socks'.



- Encourage independence: Learning the skills required for dressing can help your child feel more in control of the and allows you to praise them for putting clothes on.

Make it Familiar

- Try to keep a consistent routine of the time of day, and the order of steps when they get dressed.
- Follow a visual schedule together. Have a predictable order, and place in the home where dressing happens.
- Sit in a chair for posture support.
- Sit next to a mirror, to see what they are doing.



Calming Activities

- Have opportunities in the day to 'relax' their body without the feeling of clothing e.g. 'clothing breaks' where they wear a dressing gown, or are wrapped in a blanket.
- Before, and immediately after putting clothes on, try to do a movement or deep pressure (hugging and squeezing) game to help them adjust to the sensations. Heavy work such as push or pull games can also have a calming effect.
- If you routinely moisturize your child's skin you can use this massaging process to help calm them.



Praise & Encouragement:

Be sure to celebrate small successes, such as using a reward chart, and give verbal encouragement and praise. For example, *'I really love how you kept your clothes on after school today'*.



If you think your child takes their clothing off due to not understanding the need for clothing, rather than a sensory issue, a social story could help them to understand why they need to wear clothing e.g. for privacy, for warmth.

Useful websites

- <http://shop.sensory-smart.com/children-52-c.asp>
- <http://shop.sensory-smart.com/>
- <http://sensorysmart.webden.co.uk/undercover-tape/4588649538>
- <http://sensorysmarts.com/helpful-websites.html>
- <http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/03/28/10-tips-for-dressing-a-sensory-sensitive-child/>

Shopping suggestions:

- **M&S Easy Dressing:**
<https://www.marksandspencer.com/l/kids/easy-dressing>
- **Fledglings Sensory Clothing e.g. Seamfree:**
<https://www.fledglings.org.uk/collections/sensory-clothing>
- **Rare Birds:** Label free, soft seams, temperature regulating fabric:
<https://rarebirds.co/collections/kids>

Research evidence:

- **Use of ‘sensory garments’ can improve participation in activities for some children with Autism:** Mische Lawson, L., Foster, L., Hamner, K., & Wright, L. (2022). Exploring Effects of Sensory Garments on Participation of Children on the Autism Spectrum: A Pretest-Posttest Repeated Measure Design. *Occupational Therapy International*, 2022, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/3540271>
- **The influence of fabric type for adults with Autism:** Kyriacou, C., Forrester-Jones, R., & Triantafyllopoulou, P. (2023). Clothes, Sensory Experiences and Autism: Is Wearing the Right Fabric Important? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 53(4), 1495–1508. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05140-3>