

Dressing and undressing a typical child is normally comparatively easy as the child moves with you rather than against you. If, for example, you put a tee-shirt on over the child's head the child will automatically push the head up through the opening. The child's natural self-protective reactions and the ability to balance when being handled enable the child to adjust position and, if uncomfortable, to move or alternatively push the caregiver away. The child with CP, in contrast, often feels insecure when dressed and undressed. A child with increased tone and stiffness is limited in movements and is therefore unable to adjust when being moved. A child with intermittent spasms and involuntary movements, although more able to move, lacks stability. It is therefore important before dressing and undressing to make sure that the child is in a position in which the child feels secure and is symmetrical, that is, the head, trunk and pelvis are in alignment and the weight is evenly distributed.

General principles

1. Try to choose a position or positions for dressing and undressing the child which minimizes stiffness and unwanted movements, thus making it easier for both of you. Depending upon the child's characteristics these positions may be in lying, sitting, kneeling or standing.
2. Check to see that the child is lying, sitting, kneeling or standing as symmetrically as possible both before and during the activities. It is usually easier to dress the more affected side first and undress it last.
3. A priority when dressing any child is to make sure that all the clothes are within easy reach and where the child can see them if possible.
4. While the child is dependent upon you for dressing and undressing, make sure that the child is lying or sitting at a height which makes it as comfortable as possible for you.
5. Try to give the child lots of opportunities to help with both dressing and undressing, practising and using all the skills possessed, however limited. Always tell the child what you are going to do and what you want the child to do.

Young children - Most young children with CP are quite easy to dress and undress in the early stages.

If the young child does tend to bend or flop forwards, flexing rather a lot, it may be easier to dress or undress over your knees (**Image 1**).

If the young child does tend to push backwards, extending rather a lot, it may be easier to dress and undress either over your knees, as shown in Figure 1, or on your lap, (**Image 2**).



Image 1



Image 2

Images 3 and 4 show a way of moving the legs to **change a nappy**



Image 3
Bending a child's knees up and out to part the legs.



Image 4
Straightening the legs down from the knees.

Rolling the child towards yourself you can encourage participation, talk to the child and you can bring the child's shoulder forwards with the arm straight or in extension, which should be easier, (**Image 5**).



Image 5

Young child who tends to push back into extension and with no sitting balance.

If the child is lying on the back the supporting surface should be inclined or tilted so that the child's head is slightly higher than the feet. This should make it easier for you to bend or flex the child's head, bring the shoulders and arms forwards and bend the child's hips, knees and ankles. Alternatively you could try dressing the child in side-lying, with the more affected side uppermost first for dressing, and the least affected side uppermost first for undressing.

Images 6 and 7: a way of moving the arms to put them through sleeves.



Image 6
Turning a child's arms out and straightening them from the elbows.



Image 7
Grasping a child's hand and keeping the elbow straight.

Dressing and undressing (2/2)

Older children: Try not to miss opportunities of encouraging the child to be independent. On the one hand, try not to give the child more help than is needed but on the other hand do not allow the child to become frustrated. Each task should be broken down into small, easy stages.

Older child With some sitting balance:

If the child is dressed on your lap make sure that the child is in a good, stable, sitting position, hips bent or flexed and legs not too widely apart or abducted. By positioning the child in this way you should be able to turn the child's trunk or torso, making it easier for you to bring the shoulders forward and keep the hips bent or flexed, **(Image 8)**.

It should help you to dress the child more easily if once again you first check that the child is in a good, secure, sitting position. Then bend the child forwards at the hips and bring both arms forwards with straight elbows, palms facing up and turn the arms out at the elbows, **(Image 9)**.



Image 8

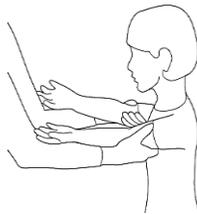


Image 9

A child who can sit but has insufficient sitting balance:

Image 10 - A child who cannot sit and maintain balance when using both hands to dress may be helped by being given a point of stability. Where and how much stabilization is needed will depend upon the ability of the child to control the sitting position **(Images 10 and 11)**.



Image 10



Image 11

A child who develops involuntary movements

If placed on the back the child lies with arms and legs in varying degrees of flexion, abduction and outward rotation. The child may also have a tendency to turn the head predominantly to one side, resulting in asymmetry of the trunk and pelvis. If the child is such a child, dressing the child in side-lying or sitting on your lap may be easier.

Probably the most comfortable position is as shown in Image 1, and especially so if the child is beginning to push the head and shoulders backwards and kick continuously

Children with Cerebral Palsy

Dressing and undressing the more severely affected child

As these children usually have little or no sitting balance they are often dressed or undressed lying either on a bed or a firm surface at a convenient height. As the stiffness, unwanted movements and changing muscle tone often increase when a child lies on the back it is worthwhile trying, at least partially, to dress or undress the child lying on the side. By rolling the child from side to side during dressing the child may not be in a position long enough to become stiff or to push back into extension **(Images 12, 13 and 14)**.

Side-lying should make it easier to put clothes over the head, put arms into sleeves, bend the hips and legs to put trousers on and do up clothes that fasten down the back.



Image 12



Image 13

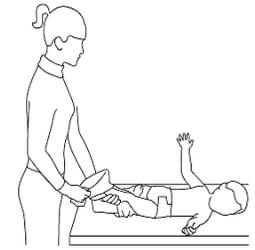


Image 14