

Advice sheet

Shoes and socks

This advice sheet offers information about helping children learn to put their own shoes and socks on.

If you have followed this advice and have not seen an improvement after six months, your School Nurse can advise about how to access therapy services.



Socks: what you may see

Children often have difficulty putting socks on correctly and end up with the heel on the top of their foot.

Strategies and advice

- Demonstrate to your child how to remove and put on socks correctly and allow them to help you.
- Try buying socks that have different coloured heels and toes.
- Trainer socks can help to establish where the heel goes without a lot of sock that needs pulling over the heel.
- Looser socks are easier so let your child practice with your socks. A little talc can be added to the bottom of the foot to help the sock slide on easily.
- Cotton socks are easier to handle than nylon
- Practice putting socks onto dolls or teddies
- “Backward Chaining” can also be used for teaching your child to put socks on. This means that you will break down the task into small steps, help them with the task and teach the last step first. When they have mastered this, let them do the last two steps and so on. In this way your child will finish the task every time and you will gradually reduce the help you are giving

Shoes: what you may see

Children can find putting on their shoes a challenge and much prefer to take them off. You may see:

- Laces left untied or stuffed into the shoe.
- The tongue wedged into the toe part of the shoe, causing discomfort and making it more difficult to put on.
- The heel of the shoe dented at the back where the child has not been able to pull it up over their heel.
- Shoes on the wrong feet.
- Velcro straps not pulled tight so the shoe is loose on the foot.



Strategies and advice

- Start with taking the shoe off properly.
- Sit behind the child and demonstrate how to take off their shoes by undoing the fastenings, pulling the shoe open to loosen it and pulling it upwards with the hand under the heel.
- Repeat the task but allow your child to do the last step i.e. to pull the shoe off.
- Continue practising the task in the same way and, as your child progresses, allow them to do more of the task e.g. pull open the shoe and then pull it off the foot.
- Allow them to practise taking off your shoes for you or shoes off their toys.
- Encourage your child to assist with fastenings.

Putting on shoes is a little trickier

- Start with putting on larger/looser shoes – dressing-up games are a good time to practise this.
- Allow your child to practise with your shoes.
- Open-back or slip-on shoes are easier to start with.
- Teach your child one of two methods according to their ability
 - Left foot over right knee and put shoe on – and vice versa
 - Place the shoe on the floor and let the child wriggle their foot into the shoe

- If your child needs extra support allow them to sit on the bottom step, against a wall or in the corner of a sofa.
- Always do the task in the same order so it is easier to remember which bit comes next e.g. loosen fastenings, pull shoe open, pull out tongue of shoe, wriggle in foot, readjust tongue and fasten.
- Initially you may need to position the correct shoe by the correct feet. If your child has difficulty putting each shoe on the correct foot you can:
 - Fix something bright onto one shoe and teach your child 'bright is right'.
 - Buy shoes with a logo on the outer side.
 - Help your child recognize their left and right shoe by drawing arrows inside the shoes pointing together
 - Hold shoes next to each other before putting them on to see if they are 'friends', that is they 'face' each other.

For more information about children and young people's health and well-being visit www.southernhealth.nhs.uk/schoolnursing