BUTTON SKILLS

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Students with fine motor and strength difficulties sometimes also have difficulty developing self-care skills. The ability to manipulate buttons typically develops between three and three and a half years of age.

Pre-Buttoning Activities

- Lacing blocks or beads onto a string
- Lacing boards
- Push coins or buttons through a slot in a lid
- Push (unattached) coins or buttons through a button hole in material

Tips to Promote Success with (Un)Buttoning

- Initially use large, easy to handle buttons, progress to smaller sized buttons on stiffer material (i.e., jeans or shirt)
- Start manipulating buttons on a table surface, with the buttons oriented to the student in the same direction as they would be on worn clothing
- Use the student's own clothing when possible, even when practicing at a table surface
- Progress to manipulating buttons while in a supported sitting and then standing position (i.e., in a corner)
- Learn front buttons first, then smaller front and side buttons, and finally back buttons
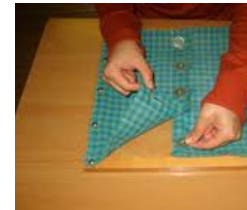
Use Chaining Techniques

Forward Chaining: Prompt student through each step of (un)buttoning, starting with them completing the first step. Gradually increase the number of steps the student completes independently.

Example of Forward Chaining to Unbutton:
- Student will tip the button forward towards the button hole
- Student will hold edge of material and tip button into the button hole
- Student will push the button through the button hole and pull through from other side

Backward Chaining: Prompt the student through each step of (un)buttoning, leaving the last step for the student to complete. Gradually increase the number of steps the student completes independently.

Example of Backward Chaining to Button:
- Student will pull the buttonhole edge of shirt over the button that is halfway through
- Student will pinch button and pull the buttonhole edge of shirt over the button that is just started in the hole
- Student will pinch button and start it through hole to button