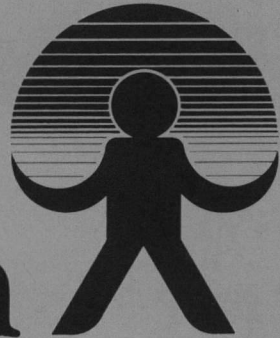


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Oregon's Children



Letters for parents of preschoolers: Letter 5

Oregon's Children



Clothing for Preschoolers Letter 5

Oregon State University Extension Service

Clothing for Preschoolers

Preschoolers are active, playful, and curious. They are rapidly growing and learning and they need clothes that will help their development. Attractive, comfortable, safe, and durable clothes make children feel good and influence a child's feelings and actions more than most parents realize.

How Preschoolers Feel About Clothes

Children like to:

Look like other children. Clothing similar to playmates helps children feel confident and ready to participate in activities and play that develop social skills. Handicap or unusual size is minimized if a child has clothing resembling that worn by other children.

Feel ownership. Clothes are possessions that children can feel are their very own. Clothes express a child's personality. Clothing in favorite colors helps children express preferences, develop a positive self concept, and learn to coordinate colors.

Be independent. Making clothing choices for daily wear or purchase, dressing themselves, and caring for clothing helps children gain confidence, independence, and a sense of responsibility.

Be active. Their strenuous activity requires clothing that allows freedom of movement without being hindered by poor fit or hazardous decorations.

Use imagination. Children develop imagination by make-believe play imitating grownup social roles and behavior.

Learn new skills. Dressing provides practice in hand and finger coordination. Choosing clothes helps children learn to make decisions. The feeling of "I can do it" and "I can choose" provides a sense of achievement.

Your Child's Wardrobe

Preschoolers are growing rapidly and do not generally need a large wardrobe. Since they spend most of their time playing, play clothes get the most wear. You should plan to spend money for quality and durability here. Some children enjoy special occasion clothing, but dress-up outfits are usually expensive and seldom worn. Avoid using clothing to display your child. Health, family activities, local climate, season, and laundry facility convenience influence the items needed in your child's wardrobe.

"Designer name" clothing has recently entered the children's wear market. Many children want clothing with special labels or appliques. Rather than refusing or reluctantly giving in, you can share clothing spending limitations with preschoolers. Although clothing choices may not be well understood by children being part of the planning process is important to them. This may reduce frustrations and guilt. Owning one "special" item may be very important to a child. If you purchase several less expensive items, you may be able to select one special shirt, dress, skirt, or jeans.

Dressing skills. As three-year-olds become independent in dressing themselves, they practice hand and finger coordination necessary to open and close fastenings. Dressing is easier with conveniently placed, easy-to-operate fasteners. Snaps, buttons, laces, zippers, and ties develop necessary hand coordination. When your children are able to dress themselves they have a new sense of independence.

The order of dressing can be confusing. It helps if you place clothing in the order it's put on. Put tops face down, bottoms face up with the waist toward the child. Help them get shoes on the right feet by marking arrows inside the shoes with a felt tip pen. Place shoes side by side on the floor. Mark arrows pointing toward each other.



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Decision making skill. Clothing with color coordinated tops and bottoms helps children to make daily choices. Helping select clothing colors and styles teaches children wardrobe coordination, comparative shopping, and other purchasing skills. Develop decision making by talking with your children about clothing choices for various activities and suitable colors and styles.

Learning responsibility. Encourage responsibility for clothing care early in a child's life. You may start by putting hooks and boxes by outside doors for coats and boots. Low hooks in children's closets encourages them to hang up their clothes.

In drawers, shoe box dividers can separate socks, shirts, and underwear. Dividers make clothes easier to find when children dress themselves or put away clothes after laundering.

Preschoolers can lighten your clothing care job too. Encourage them to tell you if their garments have rips, tears, or stains that need special treatment.

Clothing Sources

You can purchase clothing for preschoolers at many sources offering a broad range of prices, quality, and styles. Your children's needs, your clothing budget, the time you have for shopping, convenience of stores, and your skill in sewing or remodeling garments will determine which sources are most practical for you.

Children like new clothes. They have feelings of special pride and ownership when items are purchased especially for them. Even on a limited budget the purchase of an occasional new shirt, belt, or hair ribbon is worth the pleasure it gives.

Some stores offer more options for shoppers than others. Your sharp observations of quality workmanship and durability in fabrics make it possible to buy children's clothes in stores that offer shopping advantages. Look for the best buys in the following places:

Department stores offer a variety of choices in many styles, sizes, and prices. They have credit systems available and liberal return policies.

Variety stores, discount stores, and factory outlets usually offer lower prices and a variety of styles and sizes. Factory outlets have more limited selections. Major credit cards are usually accepted, but you can expect a restricted return policy.

Specialty stores offer moderate to high prices on brand name and designer garments in a variety of styles and sizes. Specialty stores offer more personal service, liberal return policies, use of major credit cards, and extras like a play area for children and gift wrapping.

Mail order catalog prices range from low to moderate on a wide range of styles and quality. They have credit systems available and accept returns, but you may be inconvenienced by time lost through mailing.

All clothing outlets reduce prices at various times of the year. You can benefit from regularly checking sales racks and advertisements.

Used clothing is an increasingly popular way for parents to stretch clothing dollars. Preschoolers grow so rapidly that clothes are often too small before they are worn out. Clothing that had good care and still looks new can be sold or traded with another family.

Used and hand-me-down clothing becomes "recycled" when you add something special that makes it a child's own garment. Altering for a better fit, adding pockets, trim, appliques, or the child's name make garments look and feel like new.

You may be able to recycle some adult garments into children's clothing, if you sew. If the fabric is appropriate for children, you can make shirts, blouses, skirts, or jackets.

Growing room can be added to favorites in a child's wardrobe. Add cuffs and fabric inserts to pants for extra length. For extra width in pants, open the side seams and add a strip of contrasting fabric to make a stripe down the side of each leg. Trim or applique added on or near contrasting stripes gives the outfit a planned look.

General Selection Guide

Consider comfort and fit, growth features, self-help features, safety, and durability when purchasing new or used clothing.

Children need clothes that fit so it's wise to try garments on before purchasing. Since children the same age may fit a number of sizes, buy by size, not age. Most preschooler clothing comes in regular and slim sizes but sizing varies with brands. Preschoolers usually have narrow shoulders, no definite waistline, and growing necks that need to be considered for good fit. Some important items to consider for **comfort and fit** are:

- Lightweight, soft, absorbent fabrics. Avoid heavy, bulky fabrics or scratchy decorations and tags.
- Enough width around the neck, chest, waist, hips, arms, and legs for comfort and movement. Avoid tight elastic or bands.
- Enough length in the crotch, legs, and arms.
- Wide shoulder straps that won't slip off and expandable waistlines that stretch.

When children try on clothes, have them sit, stoop, bend, reach, and stretch with the garment on to make sure there's plenty of room for movement.

Some garment styles allow for minor adjustments as a child grows. Clothes that start out long can be hemmed. Avoid buying garments more than one size larger than needed. Big clothes hamper a child's movements and look and feel awkward. Clothes intended to be grown into are frequently worn out before they fit properly.

Some clothing is designed with features that allow for widening or lengthening as a child grows. **Growth features** include:

- Adjustable straps for length.
- Deep hems or horizontal tucks intended to be let out for length.
- Deep adjustable cuffs for lengthening.
- Undefined waistlines on dresses and overalls, extra length on shirts and blouses.
- Separate, coordinated tops and bottoms.
- Gathers, pleats, tucks, elastic casings, and draw strings for extra width.
- Wide seam allowances to give extra width.
- Stretch fabrics.
- Elastic inserts and adjustable fasteners.
- Roomy sleeve styles; raglan/kimono or sleeveless.

Some garment styles make dressing and undressing easier for children. Clothes with **self-help features** have:

- Simple styles with openings in the front.
- Easy to identify front and back.
- Large neck openings and roomy armholes.
- Easy to use fasteners large enough for little fingers with sturdy placement on the garment front.

Children do not worry about hazards their clothing can create. But, you need to select the kind of clothing that will not present safety hazards during the unpredictable activities natural in a child's life. Clothing features that promote **safety** include:

- Light, bright colors that are easily seen.
- Separate rain hats or hoods that turn as the child's head moves.
- Flat pockets and securely attached trim.
- Long pants to protect knees and tender skin.

- Flame retardant fabrics which are presently required for all children's sleepware sizes 0-14. Flame retardant clothing may cost more but the number of severe burns from burning clothes has decreased since flame retardant requirements were introduced. Specially recommended laundry procedures for FR garments are on permanent care labels in each garment.

Clothing features you will want to avoid as a safety precaution are:

- Clothing that is too large, hindering movement.
- Floppy or wide pant legs, long floppy sleeves, hoods hanging down the back, long scarves or dress sashes, floppy pockets, drawstrings necks or necklines with ties that may become tangled in play equipment.
- Long, floppy shoe laces that cause tripping.

Durable fabrics and construction methods are essential for children's clothing that get rough treatment and frequent laundering. You'll gain the most satisfaction from **fabrics** that are:

- Preshrunk, colorfast.
- Permanent press, or easy care finished.
- Firmly woven or knitted for durability.
- Cut on grain lines with matched patterns.
- Completely washable.

Garment durability also depends on **construction details** such as:

- Small, even, continuous, straight stitching on seams that are sturdy and finished in some way to prevent raveling.
- Reinforcements at stress points; underarms, and crotch seams, elbows, knees, placket openings, buttonholes, and pocket edges.
- Large fasteners that open and close easily and firmly without pointed or rough raveling.
- Hems, trims, and pockets that are firmly attached and have finished seam edges to prevent raveling.

Label Information

Garment labels are among your best friends. You can note the size, fiber content, and care. Hangtags may contain information about a garment's special finishes, colorfastness, shrinkage control, and the manufacturer's name in case of unsatisfactory wear. Pay special attention to brands that hold up well and are sized right for your child. Use this information to save time and energy on future shopping trips.

Prepared by Janet May, graduate assistant, and Ardis Koester, Extension textiles and clothing specialist, School of Home Economics.

Dear Parents: You can be happy that clothing is readily available for the active life of children. Today's clothes allow for lots of activity, are ready to clean, and make life less worrisome for you. Wearing attractive, carefree clothing also develops your children's feelings of self-acceptance and confidence.

Sincerely,

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