

## Getting Dressed All by Myself, All in Due Time!

by Kathy Slattengren

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Young children take pride in doing things for themselves like getting dressed. However, sometimes their sense of urgency in completing a task doesn't always match their parents' sense of urgency. Parents quickly learn that encouraging their children to "hurry up" doesn't work well.

One mom complained that she would often find her four-year-old son playing with toys or jumping on the bed instead of getting dressed in the morning. She nagged him repeatedly and sometimes even helped him get dressed just to get out the door on time. This constant battle was causing mornings to be stressful and she wanted a new approach.

In order for her son to be self-motivated to get dressed quickly in the morning, he needed to see a benefit in doing so. The benefit could be eating breakfast, being able to dress at home instead of at preschool or having time for a story. Whatever the benefit, mom should let him know ahead of time and then follow through on it.



Below are some examples of how mom could approach this:

Mom could say ***"Please join me for breakfast just as soon as you are dressed. Breakfast will be served until 7:30."*** If he gets dressed quickly, he'll have time for breakfast. However, if he's slow then he's likely to miss the 7:30 time frame and also breakfast. Mom can definitely expect an uproar if he misses breakfast. She might be comforted in knowing that he will not starve and he will probably change his behavior so as not to miss breakfast in the future.

Mom could also give him a choice, ***"You can either get dressed at home by 7:30 or we can take your clothes in a bag and you can get dressed at preschool."*** Again mom can expect some serious protesting if he ends up having to get dressed at preschool. However, she will probably not have to take his clothes in a bag very often (unless he's an unusual child who likes to get dressed at school!).

Another approach mom could take is to reward him for getting dressed on time, ***"If you're dressed by 7:10, I'll be happy to read you a story while you eat breakfast."*** Mom should also make it clear that breakfast is only served until 7:30 so it is possible for him to both miss the story and breakfast.

Mom needs to select an approach she is comfortable with since it is critical for her to follow through even though it may be very difficult. If she follows through with what she promised, her son will soon learn she means what she says and will adjust his behavior accordingly. Most parents are pleasantly

surprised by how quickly their children's behavior improves once they experience consequences other than their parent's nagging, yelling or lecturing!

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