

Kids Real Life Training #2: Clothing

OK, has everyone gotten over the arguments, crabbing and general distaste for learning about anything having to do with home? My kids are probably just about ready for their second “Life Training” course. This one is on clothing. If I tell my daughter that she’ll think we’re off to the mall. My son will not be pleased from the get-go. He hates clothing period.

So here’s what we’re going to go over this time: the entire process of cleaning, caring for, storing, folding, mending, and packing clothing. How exciting!!

Let’s get started at the beginning.

Building a Wardrobe

My ten year old son doesn’t care about the idea of building a wardrobe. My 23 year old daughter does, so use this information for yourself or an older child who can understand the benefits of a well designed wardrobe. If you have all the right pieces, you will spend much less on a full assortment of options.

There are several pieces that would work nicely in just about any age closet and I’ll try to be as general as possible. Remember to explain the advantage of filling the closet with “Basics” and adding your own personality with “Accessories”.

The Basics:

* Jeans – everyone needs a couple pairs of jeans. They can be worn outside cleaning up the yard or dressed up to go out to dinner. Buy a couple cheap pair for getting dirty and one or two expensive, good fitting jeans for going out.

* Khaki Slacks – Dressier than a jean but still casual. This is a staple for young, old, male and female.



* Black Slacks – We all dress up now and then and black is always right.



* T-Shirts – White, black and a signature color in both short and long sleeves as well as tanks can be extremely versatile because they are perfect for layering.

* White and Stripe Button Down Shirts – Great for layering over T's or under sweaters and jackets. White is most versatile but add a trendy colored stripe or plaid to look fashionable.

* Crew, “V” Neck or Cardigan Sweater – Lighter weight knits work best and don't add bulk to your shape. Choose something in your favorite color.



* Hoodies – All kids need hoodies, and again, they are perfect for layering.



* Jean Jacket – I think this works for anyone young, old, female or male. This is a staple item. Just don't wear it with your jeans!!! This goes with khakis or black slacks!!!

* Dressy Outfit – As much as they hate it, most kids have to get dressed up for a school function, a dinner with family or the holidays. Most often those black slacks mentioned above for boys or a black skirt for girls will work well. Make sure you have a shirt, tie and either sweater or jacket that fits and maybe a dress for girls.

* Shoes – all kids need tennis shoes, a leather shoe for casual dress and a dressy black shoe for those dress up occasions.

Accessories

* Accessories – Don't spend much money on these extras, but have them available to perk up outfits. These include printed T-shirts, shorts, feminine tops or blouses, belts, purses, and jewelry.



Kids grow out of their clothes so quickly it just never pays to spend a lot on their outfits. Unless, handing clothing down to siblings is part of your family's routine. Then, a good quality shoe or jean jacket might last longer and provide warmth to several children if you spend a little more.

OK, with the wardrobe in place and your kid's understanding what "basics are and what "accessories" can do, let's move on.

When your child brings home a new garment from the mall, remove the sales tags with scissors. I've seen my daughter pull and tear at them and I'm sure she's going to put a hole in something brand new! Once the item has been worn, it's time to decide if the article can be worn again or needs cleaning. Generally, white items should always be cleaned even if they look unspoiled. Dark items, like black slacks can usually be worn several times before laundering so they don't fade so quickly. Best to wash them in a short, cold cycle and let them air dry. (I like to wear my dry clean only slacks at least twice before dry cleaning since it is so expensive.)

Reading the Labels

If it's time to clean, ask your child how to clean the garment. Did the garment come with instructions? They always do, so point this out and explain what the symbols mean and how that relates to the machines in your laundry room.



Some clothing care labels say that the item should be hand washed. I do have products like Woolite available, but once my daughter brought home a hand wash item and I explained what SHE needed to do to care for it....no more hand wash only items have been bought!!

Sorting, Searching and Zipping

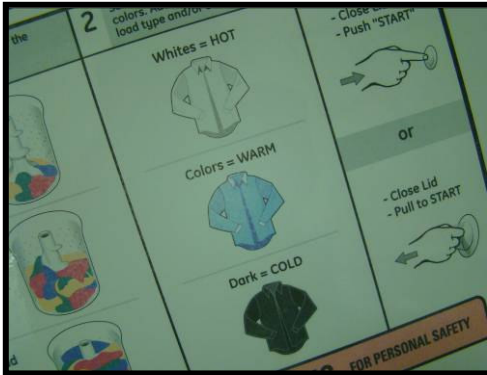
Have them bring their entire laundry basket with them and teach the whole sorting story. We do whites, mediums, darks and towels in our house and I'm sure you have a system of your own to teach your children. When my son was tiny, we played a game when sorting the clothes and he would put his white undies in with the darks and I'd fake yelling that whites don't go in with darks and I'd chase him around until he put them in the right pile. It was hours of giggly fun over the years and he still does it once in a while today to see if he can get a rise out of me!

Teach them to search through pockets of all garments looking for nails, gun wrappers, and money! I've washed my husband's iPod earphones so many times he must be on his 10th set by now. This is of course my fault for not going through his workout shorts' pockets. So make sure your kids know that Chap Stick will put terrible, unremoveable stains on anything it comes in contact with in the dryer!!

Also, it's best to zip up any zippers because the teeth on the zipper can easily catch fibers and strands of yarn from other garments and create snags that are difficult to repair. Remember, hoodies and other short zippers on sweaters and skirts as well. While you are at it, fasten the back of any bras you are washing!



How to Wash and Dry



Talk about water temperatures and explain the detergent and stain removing products that you use. I have found that Dual Power Spray and Wash works wonders, but I'm open to anything that works that is better for the environment if anyone can make any suggestions!



I've read recently that you should avoid the dryer for your clothing because this is where the real wear and tear happens. However, I can't hang clothes on a line in my neighborhood, mainly because I don't have the space and clothes racks in the laundry room would overflow into the rest of my house! I think the best rule is to use

the delicate cycle so the dryer isn't too hot which is how the wrinkling and fading happens. Remove clothes promptly, even if a bit damp and let air dry. This keeps your electric bills at bay too by cutting down dryer time.

Ironing

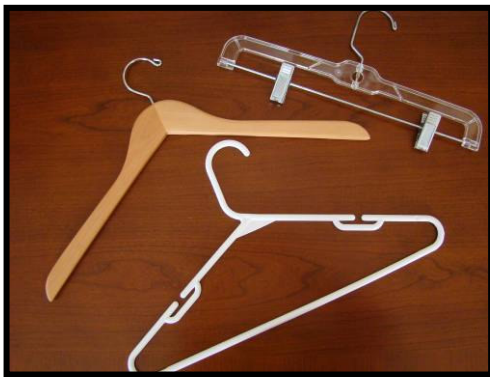
Did you know that there are actually correct steps for ironing different garments? That's right, on a shirt, start with the collar, move to the sleeves and then iron the body. Hang it immediately and do up the top and center buttons. Now I don't think your kids are going to care much about this, but older ones should know how to get a pair of pants flattened out and maybe even how to put a crease in them. Sometimes even a T-shirt can benefit from a little pressing!

As long as they understand that the garment care tag will probably tell them what heat setting to use and whether to use steam or not is at least a step in the right direction. They should know that there are different settings, that

water can be added to make steam and that some irons will shut off on their own, and some don't, so be careful!

Folding vs. Hanging

Some garment care labels will suggest that you don't hang an item. The fabric may be stretchy and hanger bumps can appear in the shoulders. If you have a special way to hold a sweater or shirt at the shoulders and fold the sides back with your fingers, perhaps lay it on the dryer and get a nice neat even fold, show your kids your technique. I work like crazy making sure everyone's clothes are as neat as possible when I finish the laundry and then my son grabs his clean clothes pile, drops half of it on the way to his room and then stuffs it all in a ball into the dresser drawers. This has to STOP! (I told you this article was written because of personal experiences!)



Teach your kids that there are good hangers and bad hangers. Drycleaners hangers that are thin and made of wire are horrible for your clothes. They are the perfect shoulder bump creators and the waxed tubular slack hangers bend and crease and don't last. Purchase the right hangers for the type of clothing you have to hang. For heavy jackets and outerwear, you may need wooden hangers to support the weight correctly and keep the jackets hanging flat and crease free. For blouses and shirts a simple thick plastic hanger will do. Sweaters that can hang might require a padded fabric hanger and skirts and slacks do well clipped at the waistband with clip on hangers.

Closet Organization

If you haven't looked at our article on closet organization you should check it out. It's in the Around the House section under organization. It shows that you can have a better organized closet with much more space if you take everything out, inventory what you have and arrange the closet accordingly.

This is important because cramming your clothes into your closet defeats all the pre-primping you've been doing by selecting the right hangers, folding

everything just so, etc. Cramming causes creasing, wrinkles and abrasion to your clothing.

If you think it's time, this could be the opportunity you've been looking for to discuss "less is more" in a wardrobe. Teach them about having good basics or staple items in their wardrobe and then dressing those staples up with great belts, special sweaters or jewelry. I'm all for individualism but I do think it can be accomplished with less than many of us think. And teaching our kids to be happy with less may be the most important lesson we teach them when we look at where our world is heading both economically and from a space standpoint. And, fewer options make getting ready in the morning a lot easier!



Off Season Storage

Not everyone is going to have the space to do this, but you may be able to carve out a bit of room under a bed or in an extra bedroom closet to store items that aren't in season. When I lived in Ohio, sweaters and heavy wool jackets had to go somewhere to make room for lightweight cotton tops and shorts when summer arrived. We did have a guest room with a closet that was perfect for this. I had several zippered hanging storage bags for jackets and slacks. These are nice because they allow some air flow around the clothing and yet they are protected from dust and light fade. Sweaters store best when they are folded. A plastic container can work well as will unused suitcases. Both slide nicely under a bed or on the floor of a closet. Just make sure to clean the clothing before storing. Stains will set over time if not removed within a reasonable amount of time.

Clothing Repairs

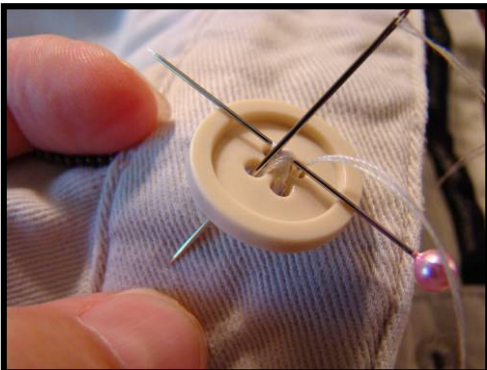
The three most common clothing repairs are ripped seams, torn out hems and buttons that have fallen off. I can fix any of these issues in a snap – my kids can't. It's OK now, but someday soon, they will be taking care of their

own clothes and they need to have a couple of these repair skills in their repertoire!

A ripped seam is best repaired with a sewing machine; however it can be done by hand to imitate the sewing machine stitch. Grab a couple of pins to hold the seam in place, I use a double threaded needle to give extra strength and it's a simple punch down and up running stitch to close a seam. Generally, I will go in reverse with my hand stitching to cover the area a second time and I feel better about the stitching holding.

A hem is more often than not repaired by hand anyway. My sewing machine does have a hem stitch on it and I use it on many projects, but a hem stitch with a needle and thread is just as good. The key to hand hem stitching is to keep the stitch that goes through the front of the fabric small and maintain even spacing. It's an art, don't get me wrong, but if a hem is out about 3 or 4 inches, no one will notice a little hand stitching. If the thread matches the garment well, it won't even be seen!

A button sounds tricky but it's an easy fix as well. Just check for other buttons on the garment to see how they were originally stitched on. Are the threads in an "x" configuration or are they parallel? Does the thread match the button or contrast? If you can match exactly what was done before, you're half way there. There is a special trick to sewing on a button and it's all about leaving enough thread space behind the button for the buttonhole to fit. Think about it, if you sew the button tight to the fabric, how is the thickness of the fabric around the button hole going to fit behind the button? Well, it won't and the button will come off again very soon.



Here's what you do, as you are sewing on the button, lay a straight pin across the front of the button and allow your stitches to go over the pin and into the holes on the button.



When you are ready to knot the thread, push the needle through the hole of the button but NOT through the fabric so the needle is between the button and the fabric. Remove the pin, pull the button away from the fabric and wrap thread around the threads holding the button on and create a collar, if you will, that will hold the button up from the fabric.



Then, push the needle through the fabric and knot it on the back.

Eliminating Clothing:

I guess this would be considered the last step in clothing maintenance - knowing when to say goodbye! My daughter and I just did this a couple weekends ago in her closet. It starts by removing everything from the closet. (So make sure you have a block of time set aside to try things on and make those hard decisions.) Have someone there to help you whose opinion you trust and let them tell you exactly what they think of everything you try on.

Fit is one thing, how well you look in an outfit is another, and the appearance of the item is another consideration. Is the sweater full of those pesky balls? Is there a noticeable stain that the drycleaner can't remove? Is there a snag or lost button? Broken zipper? These are all reasons to get rid of a piece of clothing. But remember, if the clothing is still in good shape and wearable, perhaps you could donate it to a local charity to help out those less fortunate.

If you are fretting about getting rid of a few items, put them in a bag at the back of the closet. If you don't go for the bag in a month or two, maybe you don't need those pieces any longer! And just think about it this way; if you get rid of several bags of clothing, those that remain are the cream of the crop. You will look better and feel better and best of all; you've made room for a few new things!!

Well, there are enough lessons here to keep you and your children busy for several weekends I'm sure. Keep in mind that this should be fun or you will certainly get some resistance. At this point, I've tried to teach my kids so much about the "finer" things in life, (yeah right), that they run when they see me coming! Hope it all goes better for you!

Happy teaching!

Shari



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