***Dressing and Backward Chaining***

Suppose that you were in a race that had no rules – just a finish line and a starter to say “Go”. Suppose, also, that you wanted to guarantee your success in winning that race. What would you do? After considering the possibilities, it is likely that you would decide to start the race right next to the finish line. Then, as soon as the starter said, “Go,” you would be finished – and successful.

Backward chaining views the teaching of a real skill much like the running of the unusual race just described, except that your child is the runner and putting on a piece of clothing is the finish line. **The best way to guarantee success is to start right next to the finish line or, in other words, near the completion of the task.** Then, as soon as the race begins, your child will only have a short distance to go before reaching the finish line, and experiencing success.

Backward chaining is used for teaching dressing skills by breaking them down into steps, which are always performed in the same order. For example, putting on pants can be taught using this technique. First, the dressing task is broken down into small, manageable steps.

1. Pick up pants by waistband

2. Lower pants and lift up leg

3. Put left leg into pant hole

4. Put right leg into pant hole

5. Pull pants up to knees

6. Stand and pull pants to waist

Step 6 is the closest to the completion of the task. To start your child as close to the finish as possible, you do Steps 1,2,3,4 and 5. You may have to help your child hold the pants too, so that when you say, “go,” your child can pull the pants up; and complete the task quickly and easily.

In reality, however, the race cannot remain such a simple one forever. We want to make the strategy of backward chaining useful for teaching more than just the ends of skills. You have begun by doing practically the entire task, requiring your child to do only a little to complete the task. You will continue by doing just a little less for your child each time, moving the starting line a little farther from the finish line until you eventually get to the beginning.

**BACKWARD CHAINING - AN EXAMPLE**

Let’s return to our six-step program for putting on pants, and use backward chaining. Here is the program that you will be using with your child:

**First Step:**

With your child sitting or in another comfortable position, put the pants on both feet, and then have your child stand up. Pull the pants up to your child’s knees. Then place your child’s hands on the side of the pants with your child’s thumbs inside the waistband. Say, “Pull your pants up,” and guide your child with your hands to pull the pants up to the waist. Then say, “Good, you pulled your pants up!”

**Second Step (once first step is learned):**

You put your child’s pants on up to the ankles. Place your child’s hands on the sides of the pants with your child’s thumbs inside the waistband, saying, “Pull your pants up.” Guide your child with your hands to pull the pants up to the knees. Then allow your child to finish pulling the pants up to the waist. Say, “Good! You pulled your pants up!”

**Third Step (once first and second steps are learned):**

Sit beside your child and put the pants on the left leg for him/her. Place your child’s hands on the pants and, with your hands on your child’s, say, “Put your pants on.” Guide your child in putting the pants on the right leg. Have your child stand up and finish putting on the pants without assistance.

**Fourth Step (once the first three are learned):**

Sit beside your child and lift his/her left leg. Place your child’s hands on the pants and say “Put your pants on.” Then allow your child to finish putting both legs into the pants and pull them to his/her waist.

**Fifth Step (once the first four are learned):**

With your child’s sitting, place his/her hands on the pants, allow your child to lower the pants and lift the left leg. Then say, “Put your pants on.” Remove your hands and your child can now finish putting on the pants.

**Sixth Step (once the first five are learned):**

With your child sitting, hand the pants to him/her and then say, “Put your pants on.” Allow your child to hold the pants, lower them to put both legs in, and stand to pull them to the waist. When this step has been mastered, your child will be able to put pants on without assistance once you hand them to him/her.