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

Disclaimer: These materials are adapted from the Fine Motor Pathway developed by One Kids Place Children’s Treatment Centre and North East Community Care Access Centre, (2007), and are used with permission.