

# ***Tips for Teaching Children to Sew (and Adults, too!)***

## **Patterns and Cutting:**

- *Children struggle with putting in pins. It is only necessary to pin corners, and then have them weight areas in between. For weights, have them fill empty film containers with pennies, washers, or anything that has weight, put the lid on, and place these on your patterns.*
- *Please purchase a good set of shears. If the scissors you have do not cut fabric for you, don't expect your child to be able to cut fabric with them. They do make nice dressmaking shears in smaller sizes for children. We offer Gingher scissors on our website.*
- *No need to cut notches, color coding dots are a quick and easy way to mark important guides onto your fabrics. These 1/4" round dots can be purchased at most office supply stores. You simply stick them to your fabric where the markings need to be transferred from pattern to fabric. After you have used them for guides or stitching, you just peel them off. These dots are inexpensive, quick and easy, and actually fun to use.*
- *The best marking tool to use when you are sewing is free! Save those slivers of soap left in the shower and use them to mark darker colored fabrics. Soap is quick and easy, and washes out nicely.*
- *After your pattern pieces are in place, cut around (1/2" - 1" away) the individual pattern pieces. Children have difficulty cutting angles and curves. This way they can move the pattern piece around to best be able to cut it evenly.*
- *Kids spill pins, and pin cushions are awkward. Invest in a magnetic pin holder. This is especially important if you are sewing over carpeting.*
- *If it is difficult to identify the right side of your fabric, place a safety pin on the right side of each garment piece before washing to preshrink, and before removing the pattern for sewing.*

## **The Sewing Machine:**

- *Too short? Find a pillow to put on your chair to sit taller. Then, find a box the right height to put the foot control pedal on, making it a comfortable height. Use duct tape and tape the pedal to the box.*
- *Even adults have frustration with run-away foot pedals. To keep your foot pedal from wandering on you, purchase a piece of rubber matting to place the pedal on. It's great to use under your machine, too, to keep it in place and cut down on the noise. Rubber matting can be purchased wherever area rugs are sold.*
- *If you have problems controlling the speed of your machine, try putting a piece of foam between the base and the foot pedal lever. This will slow the machine down, and give your child better foot control.*
- *Teach your child to be neat with his threads from the beginning. Masking tape a folded down small paper sack to the table to the right side of the machine to put small snips and threads in.*
- *A product called Wonder Tape can be purchased to hold seams, pocket, zippers, slick fabrics, etc. in place of pins We use Wonder Tape a lot!*

- *Children need a better seam edge guide when sewing than that little 1/2" long indentation on your sewing machine plate. You may purchase a magnetic seam gauge guide, which you can move to any seam allowance. However, this guide should not be used on any computerized machine. We also use blue painters tape which can extend further across the sewing area for more accuracy.*

## **General:**

- *Use empty film cases for bent pins and broken needles that need to be disposed of.*
- *Never teach sewing when a child is tired. As a beginner, a child needs to focus and anticipate this as a fun experience.*
- *Start children on the machine right away. There is a tendency to spend too much time on information and practice, which tends to kill their initial excitement in learning to sew.*
- *Plan projects for your children's skill level. Let them see success before they tackle a project that is too difficult. Save those tiny doll clothes for later.*
- *At about age nine, children are capable and wanting to learn to run the sewing machine. Starting them too young will cause frustration. Of course, if you have a child begging to begin, you may start them younger, just keep the sessions short.*
- *Let your children choose their own fabrics. Don't even practice on something out of grandmother's supply or leftovers. The objective is that they learn to "Love to Sew", which means projects made from fabrics they select themselves and will want to show off.*
- *It's fun for your children if you, or someone else, has time to sew with them. When I taught my daughter, I would make the project to show her how, and then she would make it. We sewed together and it was fun for both of us.*
- *Limit your children's time at the machine to two hours when beginning. You don't want sewing time to be so long that it overwhelms them, and it's wonderful to have them begging for the next session.*
- *Make sure your machine is working well. Breakdowns discourage children, and prevent them from completing projects.*
- *Do as little ripping out as possible. No one is an expert when learning. Choose projects that will forgive a stitching line that is a bit squiggly. When I teach, and even with my own daughter, I always ripped out the first time they made a mistake. If they made the same mistake again, they ripped it out. Rarely, did the same thing happen a third time!*
- *Have fun, and enjoy this special time with your child!*



**JoAnn Gagnon**  
 607 Lower Hogeye Road  
 Waitsburg, WA 99361  
 Phone: 509-337-8845 or 800-337-8845  
 Fax: 509-337-6292  
 Website: [www.bunkhousesewing.com](http://www.bunkhousesewing.com)