

How To Make “The Best T-Shirt Dress Ever”

Angels of Mercy
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Materials you'll need:

- One T-shirt (with sleeves, or a tank top)
- ½ to 1 yd of fabric depending on the size
- Thread and sewing supplies, scissors, pins, tape measure

Have you ever noticed that little girls, particularly when they are young, have protruding tummies? It is for that reason I cut the lower portion of the t-shirt off so that the fabric falls loosely from above the tummy.

Cutting the tee will make the t-shirt dress look more like a dress and less like a t-shirt with a skirt sewn on the bottom of it. I know you hate to cut off a perfectly good t-shirt but it will be worth it and you will be able to use the bottom of the tee for a headband or braided bracelet. Trust me on this one.

I'm using a solid navy blue sleeveless top I bought on sale at the end of summer last year. It is 100% cotton. For the skirt choose a 100% cotton fabric. Do not use solid white or pastels or sheer fabrics like voile or gauze that you can see thru. Just to make sure that you've chosen a good dress fabric, slip your hand in between the layers to be certain you can't see your hand. If in doubt, you should probably leave it on the shelf and choose something else. I think I can safely say that all little girls like bright colors and playful prints.

Start off by cutting part of the body of the t-shirt off. Turn the t-shirt inside out and measure down from the top of the arm opening 3" on both sides and mark with a pin. One of the things that really bugs me about t-shirt dresses is how the t-shirt stretches when the skirt is attached. Here's a little trick to eliminate the problem. Cut two 1" strips of light weight iron-on Pelon interfacing.

Lay one of the strips of the Pelon across the shirt right above the pins that you used to mark where you are going to cut. Now flip the t-shirt over and do it again on that side. This is the scary part...cut all the way across the t-shirt along the bottom edge of the white strip you just ironed on. You're going to feel like you cut it too short but it won't be. Does it look like this? Good job!



Trim the ends of the interfacing if needed and sew along the side seams and reinforce with a zig-zag stitch.

Put your bodice to the side while we work on the skirt.

All sizes use the full width of the fabric...selvage to selvage. By using the selvages it will keep the seam from raveling. Make sure if you have a printed selvage like mine that the seam is deep enough to hide it. On this fabric 1/2" should be deep enough. You want to sew just over far enough that the white edges are hidden. Here we go...sew top to bottom. Don't worry about the length of your fabric we are going to hem it later. After you've sewn in the side seam press it open so that it lays flat.

In this tutorial you are going to put the seam on the side so that the front and back of the dress appear seamless. Years ago we might have put the seam down the back so that it could button or a zipper sewn in but not today. The skirt will appear to be virtually seamless with the seam on the side under the arm. I promise you will be thrilled with the results when you finish.

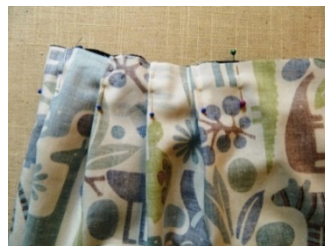
So let's lay the seamed skirt flat on the table. Place a pin on the side opposite the seam to mark the other half of the dress. Then two other pins go in the middle of the front and back. I measured with a tape but you can fold it in half if that is easier. Basically you want to mark both sides and the center front and the center back. The dress is now marked on both sides and center back and front. Like this.



Now the magic begins. Lay the dress on the table with the pins and raw edges at the top. Starting at the center back or center front (it doesn't matter) start putting in pleats. No measuring necessary. Start in the center and pinch pleat from the center toward the side seam, like this. All of the pleats move away from the center.



This is one half of my front.



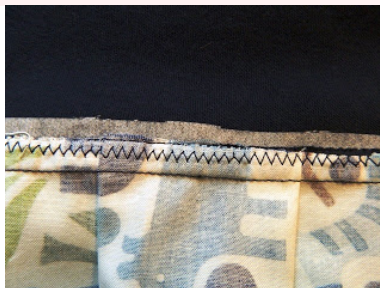
My pleats are about 1 to 1 1/2" wide and a 1/2" deep. Go ahead and pleat all around the top starting in the center and pleating toward the side seam. You will be able to put in 3 or 4 and the 4th one might be a little skimpy but that's okay keep going.

This is sort of an aerial view of the pleats.

Congratulations you just finished the most difficult part of the dress!

Why pleats rather than gathering you might wonder? Pleats are faster to put in and lay flatter for shipping, which is a good thing when you are packing hundreds of dresses.

Sew all the way around pressing the pleats down as you sew over them. If you have a serger use it and if you don't you can zig zag the seam like I did in this photo. Mine isn't pretty...but it's secure and won't ravel.



Remember that little piece of stabilizer that we ironed in at the beginning of this tutorial? This is going to keep your knit shirt top from stretching when you sew around. Pretty awesome!

Clip all the threads and turn the dress right side out. On the outside of the dress on the knit top stitch about 1/4" to 3/8" all the way around. Start at the side seam and go all the way around. Now all that is left is the hem and you're finished!

My t-shirt is a size 2-3. So using the pillowcase dress length chart below measure down the front from the center of the arm opening to the hem. I want my finished dress length to be 20" so I am going to cut the bottom of the dress off at 21" and that will give me 1" for a hem.

Size/Years old	Finished Dress Length
Infant	14-16"
1-2 years	17-19"
3-4 years	20-22"
5-6 years	23-25"
7-8 years	26-28"
9-10	29-30"
11	31-33"
12-14	34-35"

I cut the excess off with my rotary cutter or scissors. Set the scrap to the side.

Make the pocket approx. 10" square (can be smaller for smaller size dresses - don't worry about exact pocket size!) For durability, the pocket should be double fabric – you can use any plain fabric as a liner, if you desire. You can use the same dress fabric for the pocket, or you can make the pocket out of totally different fabric. You may want to sew trim on the pocket (lace, ric rac, lacy hem tape, washable ribbon, etc.) Make sure that the trim is washable and durable – don't use decorative craft ribbon because it won't hold up. Pin the pocket onto the skirt, just below the seam allowance where the skirt and bodice are joined– you can sew the pocket in the middle, or toward the side. Bring the sides of the pocket in a little at the top – don't make the pocket flat. This will allow for the girl to hold lots of her treasures in the pocket. Sew the pocket onto the dress, reinforcing the corners.

Let's hem the dress using the Easy Peasy method. Fold up 1/2" all the way around the hem pressing as you go.

After you get all the way around do it again, this second fold will be really easy. Press as you go. When you finish pressing your hem stitch as close as you can to the fold. That's it you've finished your t-shirt dress!

With thanks to: <http://dressagirlaroundtheworld-va.blogspot.com/>

