

Little Dresses for Haiti - Revised

Now that the team has been to Haiti, we have discovered that the Haitians are a very modest people. It is not acceptable for girls over the age of 6 to have their shoulders exposed. Spaghetti straps and tank tops are considered indecent exposure. Thus, the previous dress pattern is not the best for meeting the needs in the country. If you have the first 'Little Dresses for Haiti' pattern, please note that you will need to find a T-shirt to go under it. The first dress pattern was very time consuming and labor intensive. In this new pattern, I hope that you will find that it is not only easier on the budget, but much quicker to make! It also solves the problem of making dresses that cannot be used unless they have a T-shirt underneath. Any feedback or suggestions as to how to make the process even simpler are appreciated!

What you will need to make a little dress:

1. One gently used 100% cotton T-shirt from a children's resale store. (about \$0.99 to \$2.99) The 100% cotton is important as they iron everything with the old cast iron clothes pressers that you heat over an open fire.
2. Enough fabric for the skirt that coordinates with the shirt. (See chart)
3. Trim or buttons to decorate the dress.

Size	Shoulder to Waist	Skirt Length
2	8"	12"
3	9"	13"
4	10"	14"
5	10.5"	15.5"
6	11.5"	17"
7	12.5"	18.5"
8	13"	20"
10	14"	22"
12	15"	24"
14	15.5"	26"
16	16"	28"

Deciding what size to make will be determined by the size of the T-shirt. If the shirt you have does not have a number size but are marked small, medium, large, etc., those will work as well. Use the larger size in the category for the skirt length.

X-small = size 2 to 4
Small = size 5 to 6X
Medium = size 7 to 8
Large = size 10 to 12
X-large = size 14 to 16

The shoulder to waist measurement is taken from the mid point of the shoulder to the waist. The mid point of the shoulder seam on the T-shirt measuring down the T-shirt will give you the same measurement.

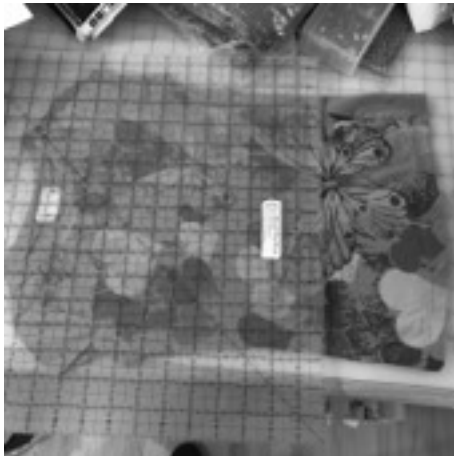
The skirt length measurement includes a 2" hem. Ties are appropriate for sizes 7 to 16. Plan on an extra 6 to 7" of fabric to make the ties.

Remember, these children have very dark skin. Please do NOT use fabrics that you can see through when wet or dry. If you only have light colored fabric, use two layers. This might be the only piece of clothing that the child owns other than their school uniform. The climate is tropical, so there are frequent rain showers that can soak you to the skin in seconds.

Select your T-shirt! You can either pick a shirt that compliments fabric you already have, or take the T-shirt you have chosen to the fabric store to make your selection for the skirt. With this pattern you will need about half the amount of fabric required by the earlier dress pattern. At the price of fabric,

this is good news! Pre-owned T-shirts are much less expensive than new. Be sure to choose one that is not see through (also, no flames, skulls, witches, or anything to do with the devil or the dead), and 100% cotton. This will ensure that the dress will last for at least a year. This is important when you only have one garment that you can wear other than your school uniform, and you are unable to wear your school uniform for anything except school!

For the purpose of demonstration, the following instructions will be for a size 6 dress. If you have access to a large quilter's square and cutting mat, look at the first photo. If you do not have these tools, don't worry, you can do without them. Look at the next two photos.



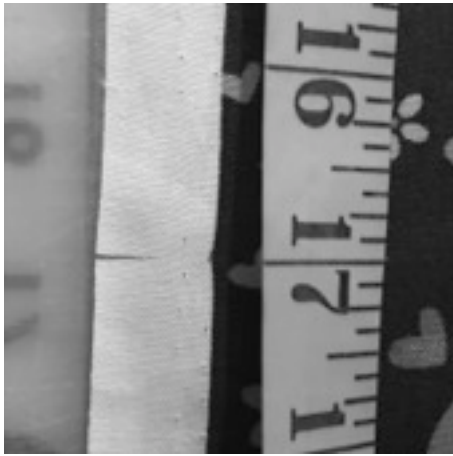
Measure down from the mid shoulder line the distance indicated for the shoulder to waist measurement. Mid shoulder and the top of the back of the neckline are often times equal. For size 6, this measurement is 11.5". Place the ruler, making sure that it is evenly placed, and cut across the shirt. Congratulations! You have just completed the dress bodice!



For those of you who do not have large rulers and a cutting mat, the process is very similar and not difficult.

Using a tape measure, measure down from the mid shoulder seam the distance indicate for the shoulder to waist measurement for the size you are making. In this instance, I was making a size 6, so I measured down 11.5". Place a mark with a pin or an ink pen to indicate where you measured to. Repeat this procedure on the other shoulder of the T-shirt. Make sure that your measurements are the same. Take a ruler, yardstick, or any sort of straight edge and lay it across the T-shirt so that you can just see the two marks you have made. Press down firmly with the straight edge, to keep the fabric from shifting. Draw a line across the shirt. While the shirt is still laying flat, place pins at intervals across the shirt above and below the line you have drawn. This will help to stabilize both layers of fabric so that you can cut it easily. Once the pins are in place, cut on the line across the T-shirt. Congratulations! You have just completed the dress bodice!





The next step is to make the skirt.

For size 6, you will note on the chart that the measurement given is 17". This measurement includes a 2" hem allowance. Each of the skirt measurements given include a 2" hem allowance.

Measure down from the top edge of the fabric about 1/2". Make a small snip in the selvedge, then tear across the fabric. The fabric will tear in exactly a straight line across the grain of the fabric. Then, measure from the torn edge down the length of the fabric to the appropriate measurement for the size dress that you are making. I measured 17" as that is the measurement for the size 6 that we are making in this demo. Again, make a small snip in the selvedge edge of the fabric. Tear across the fabric to the last 1/4". Cut the last 1/4" with scissors. (This will help to limit the fraying caused by tearing the fabric).

You now have a perfectly symmetrical piece of fabric for the skirt.



Place right sides of the fabric together. Line up the selvedge edges and stitch a 5/8's inch seam. If the fabric has a wide manufacturing label on one edge, stitch along the label keeping your stitches in the colored or main portion of the fabric, as seen in the photo to the left.



Then stitch a second line of stitching about halfway between the first seam and the edge of the fabric. This is important as there is no electricity in the rural area of Haiti and owning your own needle and thread means that you are wealthy. We did not meet one wealthy person while we were there! Please reinforce the seam in this manner.





Press the seam to one side. Then, stitch about 1/4" from the seam line (using matching thread for the fabric) stitching through all the layers, and securing the seam allowance to the inside of the dress back.

You are now ready to connect the skirt and the bodice (T-shirt)!



Divide the dress bodice into four equal quarters; place a pin on each side, at center front, and at center back.



Do the same with the skirt of the dress. Place a pin at the seam, which will be the center back. Place pins also, at center front. Then line up those two pins and it will be easy to find both side seams. The skirt should now have pins in the same positions as the bodice.



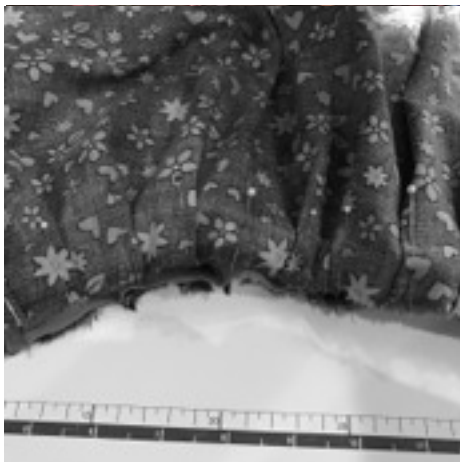
Start by matching the center back pin on the bodice to the center back pin on the skirt. Place one pin that holds the two together. Repeat the matching process until there are pins holding all four quarters together. You will notice that the skirt is fuller than the bodice.

(For the larger sized dresses, you will use 1 and 1/2 widths of the fabric for fullness in the skirt. That will give you two seams in the skirt. Both are sewn in the same manner as the single seam. For this step, as long as one of the seams is at center back, the other seam will also be somewhere at the back of the skirt. If you are compulsive about the symmetry of the seam placement, you can divide the short distance between two seams to create the center back).

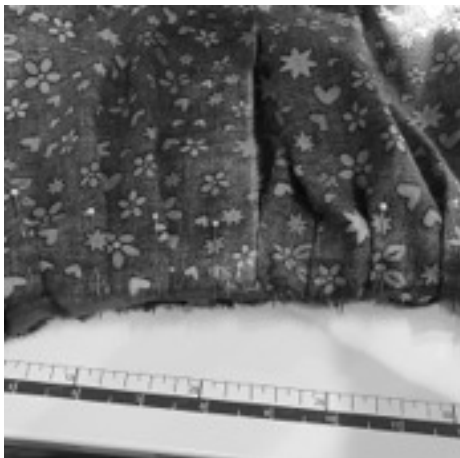


Using your thumb as your guide, pinch some of the fullness into a pleat and pin. (In the photo I have picked an arbitrary spot on my thumb, just past the knuckle, to use as the guide for the distance between the pleats. See the relationship of the knuckle on my thumb to the pin of the last pleat). Start at the center back and work towards the sides. Make the pleats fold toward the center pin in the back and the front. This means that each side of center will go in opposing directions.

Try to space the pleats at even intervals in each quarter of the dress waistline. If you end up with too much fabric left by the time you reach the next quarter of the dress, start again and make a little deeper pleat. It takes a little practice, but it is not rocket science. It does NOT have to be perfect! If you do not have enough fabric left, the inverse is true. Remove a little fabric from the pleats you have made to space them more evenly. Repeating rule #1. It does NOT have to be perfect!



Here is the center pin (marked by the red arrow). You can see that the pleats are folded toward the center pin on each side.



The center back appears much the same. Note the center seam. The pin in the center is placed directly on the line of stitching, the first 5/8" seam that we took in the back of the skirt, during its' construction.



Stitch the the bodice and skirt together using a $\frac{5}{8}$ " seam. Be sure that the bodice (T-shirt) fabric is on the bottom, away from the presser foot. Check underneath before you sew each section to make sure that there are no folds in the bodice that could get caught in the seam. When you have stitched all the way around, place a second row of stitching about halfway between the first row of stitching and the raw edge. This is the same method that you used to make the seam in the back of the skirt.

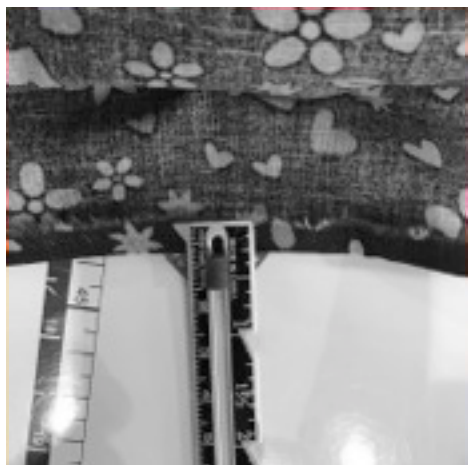
Remember, this dress must last much longer than we expect our own clothing to last. Once it gets to Haiti, there is absolutely no hope of making any repairs, no matter how minor!



Top stitch about $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the seam line along the lower edge of the bodice through all layers.



Fold up the lower edge of the skirt and measure for the 2" hem and pin securely.



Make another fold $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the edge. Press this small fold down. Some of you will feel that I did this backwards. You may do these steps as makes sense to you. I fold the 2" hem first as I know that I have only allowed 2" total for the hem. Then, if my measurement is a bit generous for the $\frac{1}{4}$ " measurement, I know that the dress will still be the correct length. You may stitch the $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam down first, or stitch the entire hem all at once.

I have done this both ways, and usually rely on the character and cooperation of the fabric I am working with to tell me which way will work best for the dress I am making.



This photo shows that the hem is stitched very closely to the edge of the turned under hem. Note that I did not use a thread that matched the fabric. This is because, now, I have a lovely line, on the right side of the fabric, that tells me where to place the decorative trim on the dress. The decorative trim serves two purposes; 1). makes the dress look even cuter! 2). reinforces the hem so that it stays securely in place.



Now, audition some trims for the dress. I played with several different trims (my mother loved trims and left me a large, varied supply) and after auditioning several options, finally decided which one I liked best on this dress.

(If you need trims for the dress you are making, please ask. As long as my supply holds out, I am willing to share)!



Having finally decided on the pink rick rack, I am ready to stitch it on. In the shape of the rick rack, the lowest part of the design on the left side of the rickrack makes a good guide. Place the low spot on the left side of the rickrack over the line of stitching for the hem. Use a zigzag stitch to secure the trim. I used a triple zigzag. If your machine does not have this stitch, a plain zigzag will work.



Here, the decorative trim is on and you can see the zigzag stitch.



Here, you can see how sewing on the trim reinforces the hem.



This is the finished dress. I have not been putting ties on the dresses size 6 and under. They are easy to make and easy to add and give nice shape to the larger size dresses.

The ties are made from two 3" or 3.5" strips the width of the fabric. Fold the long strip in half lengthwise, stitch across one end (be sure to backstitch) and down the length of the strip using a 1/4" seam allowance. Trim the corners on the closed end of the strip. Then, take a bamboo skewer and push the blunt end into the closed end of the strip so that it makes a little pocket. Then continue pulling the fabric and pushing the stick until the strip is turned right side out. Dump out the bamboo skewer and put it back into the strip pointed end first. Gently work the points into the corners on the closed end until they are as close to square as you can get them.

Finger press the seam flat. (It will fold much easier along the seam line if you finger press it flat first). Using a hot steam iron, press the strip flat. The length of the ties vary with the size of dress you are working on. A medium (sizes 7-8) will need ties that are 28" to 30" in length; the large (sizes 10-12) will need 29" to 31" in length; and the x-large (sizes 14-16) will need 30" to 33" in length. Place the raw ends of the ties on opposite sides of the t-shirt over the side seams (if applicable). Pin them on, centering the tie over the seam allowance of the waistline seam. The long tails should be towards the front of the dress. Triple stitch close to the end of the tie and repeat this about 1/4" away to secure the end. Smooth the tie towards the back of the dress and top stitch 1/4" from the fold to secure the tie and hide the raw end of the tie. Repeat on the other side of the dress.

Happy Sewing!