

Girls Sundress Sewing Guide

From First Cut to Finished Dress

A free step-by-step workbook from Sewing.com

This guide walks you through every stage of sewing a girls sundress: choosing the right free pattern, measuring and sizing, cutting, constructing, and finishing. Each step includes a fix-it note so you know what to do if something goes wrong before it becomes a wasted afternoon of fabric.

WHAT IS INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- Pattern checklist: 3 things to confirm before you print any free pattern
- Style selector: which pattern type matches your skill level
- Sizing workbook: fill-in chart using your child's measurements
- Full 6-step construction sequence with fix-it notes at every stage
- Fabric and yardage reference by size range
- Quick-reference troubleshooting table for the 5 most common problems

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Work through the checklist and sizing chart before you cut anything. Then follow the construction steps in order. If a step is not working, go to the fix-it note at the bottom of that step before moving on.

STEP 1 OF 4 — CHOOSE THE RIGHT PATTERN

Pattern Quality Checklist

Before you download or print any free girls sundress pattern, confirm all three items below. Patterns that fail any check require extra skill to use correctly. Set them aside regardless of the photos.

- Seam allowances stated**
Look for a note like '5/8 inch seam allowance included.' No mention means no allowance.
- Grainline on every piece**
A grainline arrow must appear on every pattern piece, including facings and straps.
- Construction diagram included**
At least one diagram showing how pieces join before sewing.

STYLE SELECTOR — WHICH PATTERN TYPE MATCHES YOU?

Choose the style you can finish this weekend, not the one you plan to make eventually. A completed simple dress teaches more than an abandoned complicated one.

Style	Skills Taught	Time Estimate
Pillowcase/tube dress	Straight seams, casing, hem (3)	1-2 hours
A-line with strap	Seams, strap, neckline facing (4)	2-3 hours
Empire + gathered skirt	Seams, gathering, waist seam (5)	3-4 hours

FIRST-MAKE RULE

Choose a pattern with no zipper, no lining, and no set-in sleeve. Those three features can each become a project-stopping problem on a first make. Add them on the second make of the same pattern.

STEP 2 OF 4 — SIZE THE PATTERN FOR YOUR CHILD

Sizing Workbook

Children's pattern sizes are based on body measurements, not clothing sizes. Fill in your child's measurements below, then compare them to the finished garment measurements column on your pattern to choose the correct size. Cut for the measurement, not the label.

YOUR CHILD'S MEASUREMENTS

Full chest (measure at widest point, snug but not tight) _____ inches

Natural waist _____ inches

Height (shoulder to floor) _____ inches

Desired dress length (shoulder to hem) _____ inches

HOW TO COMPARE TO THE PATTERN

1. Find the 'Finished Garment Measurements' table on your pattern (not the size chart).
2. Match your child's chest measurement to the finished chest column.
3. If between sizes, cut the larger size at the chest and taper in at the waist if needed.
4. Add 1 inch of length per 6 months of expected wear at the 'lengthen here' line.

FABRIC YARDAGE REFERENCE

Always check your pattern's yardage requirement. These are estimates for 44-inch-wide fabric.

Size Range	Style	Yardage (44" wide)
Toddler 2T-4T	Simple casing dress	1.0 - 1.5 yds
Child 4-8	A-line or empire waist	1.5 - 2.5 yds
Child 8-14	A-line or empire waist	2.0 - 3.0 yds

PRE-WASH RULE

Wash all fabric before cutting. Budget quilting cotton can shrink 5 to 8 percent in a hot wash. A sundress that fits before washing may not fit after.

Construction Sequence (Steps 1-3 of 6)

Press every seam before crossing it with another seam. That one habit changes the finished result more than any other single technique.

Cut and Mark

- 1 Cut all pieces in the same direction, with the grain. Mark notches with small scissor snips into the seam allowance only, not into the garment piece.

Fix-it: If a piece looks narrower than expected after cutting, check the grain before re-cutting. Bias-cut pieces distort under their own weight.

Sew and Finish Side Seams

- 2 Sew side seams directionally from hem to underarm. Press seams open. Finish seam allowances with a zigzag stitch or pinking shears.

Fix-it: If the seam puckers, shorten stitch length to 2.0 mm. If it still puckers, re-thread from scratch. Most stitch problems are threading errors.

Construct Straps or Neckline

- 3 Fold strap lengthwise, press, open, fold raw edges to center crease, press, topstitch both long edges. Pressing before topstitching is what makes the strap lie flat.

Fix-it: If the strap twists during topstitching, the fold was not pressed firmly. Press again before the second pass.

PRESSING IS CONSTRUCTION

A seam that is not pressed before the next seam is sewn will create bulk at every intersection. Press after every step, not just at the end. A tailor's ham is useful for curved seams; a clapper for crisp flat seams.

Construction Sequence (Steps 4-6 of 6)

4 Attach Bodice or Construct Casing

Fold at the marked casing line and press before pinning. Stitch close to the lower fold, leaving a 2-inch gap for elastic. Thread elastic with a large safety pin. Overlap ends 1 inch, sew securely, close the gap.

Fix-it: If the casing gathers unevenly after elastic insertion, it has twisted. Remove one end of stitching, pull the elastic flat, and re-sew.

5 Attach Skirt to Bodice

Baste two parallel rows at 3/8 inch and 5/8 inch from the skirt top edge. Pull both bobbin threads to gather. Match side seams and center points first, then distribute gathers evenly.

Fix-it: If gathers bunch at seam joins, anchor a pin at each seam intersection first and redistribute gathers outward from those pins.

6 Hem

Turn hem 1/4 inch and press. Turn again 3/4 inch and press. Sew close to the inner fold. This double-fold hem is wash-resistant and lies flat on woven cotton without hand-finishing.

Fix-it: If the hem waves after sewing, the fabric was not pre-washed. Trim to an even depth, re-press, and re-sew.

STEP 4 OF 4 — TROUBLESHOOT COMMON PROBLEMS

Quick-Reference Troubleshooting

Problem	Most Likely Cause	Fix
Seam puckers	Thread tension or stitch length	Re-thread; try 2.0mm stitch
Strap twists	Fold not pressed before sewing	Press firmly before topstitch
Casing lumps	Elastic twisted inside	Remove end, flatten, re-sew
Gathers uneven	Basting pulled unevenly	Anchor at seams first
Hem waves	Fabric not pre-washed	Trim, press, re-sew

You finished the dress.

A completed imperfect dress teaches more than an abandoned perfect plan.

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