

Independence and Self-Help Skills

Self-help skills are worth the time and effort. The secret to success is to give children age-appropriate experiences and provide the appropriate supports to help them be successful. Remember that adults are important role models. We model self-help skills; children learn a great deal from watching us.

I'd love to share some self-help skills with you to teach your child that you can start working on how to help set your child up for success when it comes time for kindergarten.

Children are born with an innate drive to become independent. As they grow, so does the desire to do more and more on their own. As parents and caregivers, we can help our children to become more independent by allowing them time and encouraging them to master tasks on their own.

During our regular daily routines, it can be faster or less messy to do things for our children, but they learn so much from doing things for themselves. While we have this time at home without our children, this may be the perfect opportunity to slow down and allow that extra time for our children to practice self-help skills.

By doing things like feeding and dressing themselves, they are practicing their large and small motor skills, gaining confidence in their ability to try new things and building their self-esteem and taking pride in their independence.

Dressing

Why must they know how to dress at school? Accidents happen – it's good plan to have extra clothes in their backpack! Paint spills, muddy playgrounds, and there isn't always enough time to make it to the bathroom. There are plenty of times where your child may need to change clothes. In winter, they will need to transition from indoor to outdoor clothing several times a day. Take the time now to practice dressing and undressing so that you can be sure that if they need to, they'll be able to change their clothes on their own.

Using the Bathroom

Ok, this is an easy one, right? I know what you're thinking: I got this one, they can use the potty on their own! However, using the bathroom alone at school can be a different story.

Some things to consider are- can your child unbutton/unzip/pull down their own pants? Can your child get themselves on the toilet seat? Is your child able to navigate wiping themselves without too much trouble?

Most kindergarten classrooms do have their own bathrooms, but some in larger schools will use the main washroom. These may have hand dryers, which can be scary and odd for kids. Have them practice and get used to what navigating a bathroom alone is like. Set everyone up for success, if you haven't already start practicing climbing up and down on the toilet on their own, also use the toilet without the potty seat on top. To make this a little fun, you could use the hairdryer at home to practice air drying, just like at school.

Zip and Button

These two skills will come in handy when using the bathroom, when going out or coming in from recess, and when packing and unpacking for the day. Luckily, these are easy skills to practice. You can make a board with zippers, buttons, and laces. They will love helping to make it and practice some skills when it's done.

Hand Washing

Some important skills here include; amount of soap to use (many kids go way overboard!), how long to wash (most kids don't do it long enough!) I sing happy birthday twice, and how to dry efficiently without using 100 paper towels (I taught my own kids how to do a 10 second shake over the trash can before using a paper towel in order to cut down on using too many)! These are all things that you can practice at home and when using public restrooms. There can always be an element of fun. Think of fun characters on the bottle, or maybe a favourite scent.

Opening and Closing Containers and Straws

Once at school your child will have to navigate opening and closing lunch containers and wrappers throughout the day. Some containers and wrappers are a lot harder than others, so make sure to practice at home to make sure they can open them on their own. Many schools will have lunch helpers (older grade students), but your child will feel much more capable if they can do it on their own without having to wait for help. Practice with containers and wrappers at home. Think about packing a backyard picnic using some containers to see which ones your child finds easier to open and close.

Clean up

Even if you think your child has mastered this one, it's important to keep practicing and encouraging you child to clean up after themselves. It can be easy at home to fall into a routine where your child "sort of" picks up, and then you do the rest. At school, it will be important that they know how to clean up from start to finish. The teacher will not be able to (nor should they) clean up after 20+ young people!

Tips:

- Que a transition with a 10 min warning
- Sing a clean-up song
- Label shelves or containers so children know where to place items
- Have a visual chart of what to clean
- Make cleaning up a habit

Ways to make it fun!

- Show match – put all of the family's shoes or (dolls shoes) into a pile. Have everyone make as many matches as they can before all the shoes or socks are gone.
- Have an obstacle race in the backyard with one station of getting dressed. Have pants, sweaters, hats, shoes, and backpacks.
- Have a picnic in the backyard where everyone packs their own backpack with the things they need for lunch
- Hang a visual chart of what order clothes should be put on
- Make a board with zippers, buttons, and laces to be done and undone.