



Self-Care & Independence Skills

Helping Your Child Build Daily Living Skills

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1 Feeding Skills by Age

Self-care skills build independence, confidence, and a sense of competence. When children struggle with these skills, it affects self-esteem and family routines. This guide outlines typical development and practical strategies.

6–18 Months

Holds bottle, picks up finger foods with pincer grasp, begins to hold a spoon. Pre-load the spoon and hand it to them. Expect mess — it's part of learning.

18mo–3 Years

Uses spoon and fork with some spilling, drinks from a cup, pours from a small pitcher. Model utensil use and offer thick foods that stay on the spoon.

3–5 Years

Uses fork and spoon proficiently, begins to use a knife to spread, opens simple containers. Let them serve themselves and help prepare simple foods.

2 Dressing Skills by Age

1–2 Years

Pulls off loose socks and shoes, pushes arms through sleeves, removes unfastened coat, unzips large zippers.

2–4 Years

Puts on shirts and pants, attempts socks, buttons and unbuttons large buttons, puts shoes on correct feet (with occasional mistakes).

4–5 Years

Dresses completely independently, manages all fasteners, selects weather-appropriate clothing. Shoe tying typically mastered around 6–7.



3 Grooming & Toileting

Teeth Brushing

- 12–18mo: Parent brushes, child watches
- 2–3yr: Child holds brush, parent guides
- 3–4yr: Child brushes with supervision
- 5–6yr: Independent with checks

Hand Washing

- 18–24mo: With hand-over-hand help
- 2–3yr: Independent with reminders
- 3–4yr: Independent, remind about soap
- 4–5yr: Independent, occasional prompts

4 Toileting Readiness

Wait until your child shows readiness signs before starting toilet training. Pushing too early often backfires. Look for these signs (typically 2–3 years):

Signs of Readiness

- Stays dry for 2+ hours
- Shows awareness of wet diaper
- Can pull pants up and down
- Shows interest in the toilet
- Communicates need to go

Tips for Success

- Use consistent language
- Routine: after meals, before bed
- Celebrate success without pressure
- Respond calmly to accidents
- Use a visual routine chart

! No progress after 3+ months of consistent effort

! Regression after being successfully trained

! Extreme fear or anxiety about the toilet

! Age 4+ with no interest or readiness signs



5 Building Independence



Break Tasks into Steps

Instead of "get dressed," break it down: take pajamas off, put on underwear, put on pants, put on shirt, put on socks. Small steps build confidence.



Use Visual Supports

Picture schedules for morning and bedtime routines, step-by-step photos for hand washing and teeth brushing, chore charts with pictures.



Practice Backward Chaining

Complete most of the task for your child, but let them do the LAST step. Once they master it, let them do the last TWO steps, and so on.



Allow Extra Time

Rushing children through self-care tasks teaches dependence. Build in 10–15 extra minutes for morning routines so they can practice at their own pace.



Celebrate Effort, Not Perfection

"You pulled your shirt on by yourself! It's inside out, but you DID it!" Fix it casually afterward, or let it go entirely.

Pro Tip from Our Therapists

Lay clothes out in order (underwear on top, then pants, then shirt).
Teach "tag in the back" for shirt orientation. Small tricks build big confidence.





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