

Teaching Self-Care Skills

MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS THERAPY TEAM

It's really important that children learn to do things for themselves so that they can become independent and continue to develop new skills and abilities as they grow up.

Some children struggle to take control of certain tasks and need a bit of extra support. This helpsheet takes you through the different stages of developing self-care skills and gives tips on teaching methods and ways of motivating and encouraging children.

Three levels of independence

We're going to concentrate on three key levels of independence in self-care skills:

★ Mastering the basic steps

Such as learning the actions required to put on clothes.

★ Making decisions about skill performance

Knowing when the skill is needed, what materials are needed, how to begin and whether the skill has been done well.

★ Developing a routine

Completing more than one skill in the proper order, with no prompts from anyone.

Motivation

Self-care skills are not the most fun activities. Therefore you may need to use rewards to motivate your child. The reward could be praise or a hug, time doing a favourite activity or a snack.

You could use a sticker chart. For some children the sticker is the motivation or other children may need further motivation and a number of stickers could be exchanged for a new book or toy, time watching TV, playing outside etc.



Mastering the basic steps

1. Choose the skill

The skill needs to be one your child is ready to learn, wants to learn and one you want to teach.

2. Establish the steps

Think about all the steps that make up this skill. It can be helpful to do the skill yourself a few times making a list of the steps as you go along.

3. Think about a reward

If your child is not motivated to learn the skill you have chosen you may need to reward achievement. The reward could be smiles, hugs, praise, favourite activities, a snack or a present.

4. Set the stage

When will you teach the skill? Where will you teach the skill? How will you reduce distractions? What materials will you use?



Teaching tips

Tell - Show - Guide

Use verbal direction, demonstrate how to do things and use hand over hand physical guidance.

Backward chaining

Create a list of steps. You complete all the steps for/with your child except for last step. You teach this step and get your child to complete it independently. Once your child has mastered the last step, teach the step before it. Gradually your child learns the whole skill, one step at a time.

Review progress and reward



Making decisions about skill performance

Your child maybe able to dress but may still rely on you to supervise and direct them during dressing. The goal is to have your child make decisions by learning to ask and answer four basic questions:

1. When do I need to do the skill?

Your child may not know - or may forget - when a skill is needed, and you probably remind them. It's important that you wait before helping and see what happens.

If your child doesn't remember ask a guiding question rather than telling them. For example, when dressing, rather than saying "you will need a jumper today", say "What's the weather like? What do you need to wear?"

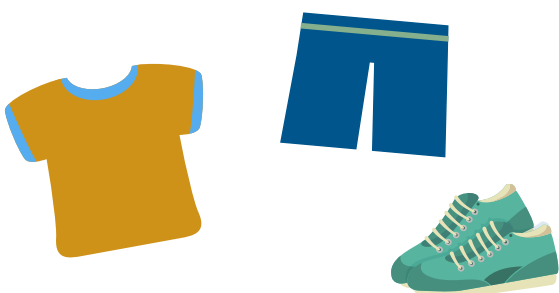
Gradually fade these questions out and start to use more general questions that get your child to question themselves such as "What do you need to ask yourself?"



2. What materials do I need?

Get your child thinking about what they need to do the task. You can make a game out of asking questions such as:

- "If it was raining now, what would you be wearing?"
- "What do we take when we go to the beach?"
- "What would you do if you got a cut on your little finger?"

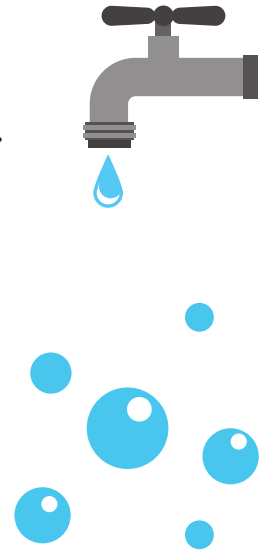


Do not gather things needed for a task e.g. don't choose their clothes for them.

Do ask questions to help your child do it for themselves.

3. Which steps first and then next?

- You can help your child start a task, for example lay out clothes on the bed or turn on the water for a bath. You may have to teach your child how to do these first steps.
- Have your child watch you perform the first step. Describe the process aloud, slowly and carefully.
- Next, guide them through the process, emphasising each portion aloud.
- Later have your child attempt the step on their own, giving only verbal help.
- Fade out your instruction.



4. When have I finished and done a good job?

- Teach your child to use the mirror and ask the appropriate questions, for example:

Did I miss anything?
Is it on right?
Does it look okay?
Is my hair brushed?

To teach your child these skills you have to:

1. Pull back a bit and keep your assistance to a bare minimum
2. Replace your answers with questions about your child's performance





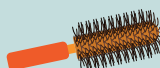


Developing a routine

Your child may be able to complete lots of tasks but needs prompts to put them into a routine. So for example getting ready for school is made up of lots of tasks your child is able to complete but they may need help to move from one task to the next in the right order with out getting distracted and drifting off.

Your need to teach your child to use the end of one skill as the cue or signal to begin another. Teach your child to ask themselves "What next?"

Using a chart

A chart can be used to reinforce a routine. For example a morning routine chart for a child may look like the one below:

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	★						
	★	★					
	★						
		★					
	★						

- Involve your child in making the chart
- Keep it simple
- Keep it in sight
- Keep giving praise - the chart will hopefully replace your reminders but not your interest