

INDEPENDENCE FOR SELF-CARE SKILLS

Occupational Therapy

Self-care skills including dressing, toileting, and bathing are very much a part of our everyday lives. It is important to foster an interest, as well as your child's cooperation at an early age, for independence in self-care tasks for several reasons including:

- Self-esteem development.
- Active physical participation.
- Therapeutic benefits.

So never miss an opportunity to encourage your child to be independent. Because they occur daily, self-care tasks can be practiced on a regular basis.

To Promote Independence

- Recognize and encourage any attempt or efforts your child makes to help with/complete the tasks. Encourage and praise them, no matter how small the attempt.
- Establish a place and routine for encouraging self-care independence.
- Allow time for your child time to respond and attempt to participate or complete the task.
- With repetition and practice, your child will begin to anticipate the next step and you will be able to withdraw your cues.
- Consider the position your child is in during the task. They need to feel physically secure in order to participate – feet flat on floor, knees and hips bent.
- Act as a model for your child. This is most easily done by sitting in front of your child.
- Provide verbal cues for self-care. Talk with your child while completing the task.

- Backward chaining may help. Ask your child to assist with the last step in the sequence. Gradually add steps until your child is able to complete the tasks independently.

Dressing

Children begin to co-operate with dressing/undressing in a very simple way by helping to put arms into/out of sleeves, put legs into and out of pants, and pull off socks.

Encourage Dressing Readiness

- Talking about the parts of the body and naming clothing.
- Assist in developing awareness of the self in space.
- Assist in developing understanding of “in, out, up, down, push, pull”.
- Assist with positioning so child can assist with dressing tasks.
- Develop grasps (i.e. to use pincer for fasteners, strength in grasp to pull up pants).

Development of Dressing / Undressing Skills

Stage #1

Child co-operates in dressing, holds foot or arm out or pushes arm or leg through sleeves or pant leg; pulls off hats, mittens, socks, shoes.

Stage #2

Child learns to undress first; removes unfastened coat; helps push down; garment/removes pull-down pants with elastic waist; finds armholes in sleeves; puts on front-button coat, shirt, etc.; unbuttons 1 large button.

Stage #3

Child tries to put on socks; puts on t-shirt with some assistance; places shoes on feet (may be wrong feet); independent with pull down garment; zip/unzip jacket with assistance; needs assist to remove t-shirt; begin to develop management of fasteners.

Clothing/Dressing Suggestions

- Begin with loose fitting, oversized, and comfortable clothing.
- Clothes without fasteners are easiest (i.e., t-shirts and elasticized waists).
- Tubular socks with no heel are easier to put on and seamless socks or socks turned inside out will prevent marks and be more comfortable.
- Mittens are easier to put on than gloves.
- Add key chains/rings or braided yarn to zipper to make it easier to pull up and down independently.
- Begin with large buttons or sew buttons permanently and place Velcro to fasten.
- Elastic shoelaces can facilitate shoe tying.
- Encourage parents to select clothing with a minimum of frustration -minimal number of fasteners, large buttons and buttonholes, large tabs on zippers/zipper pulls, loose fitting clothing with large neck and armholes.
- Lay the coat on the floor and use the arms in and over-head method.
- If the coat has a hood, have the child put the hood on their head first, then the coat will hang in a way that makes it easier to place arms in the sleeves.
- Add visual cues: e.g., put arrows in shoes- when shoes are placed side by side, arrows should point to one another; add mark in the back of a jacket or sweater that does not have a label.

Feeding

Encouraging independent self-feeding can be a balance between adequate nutritional intake and physical independence. Public Health Sudbury and Districts has some helpful handouts available on “Introducing solid foods,” and “Texture of complimentary foods.”

Encouraging Feeding Readiness

- Encourage your child to bring their hands to their mouth.
- Encourage oral motor exploration using safe toys (and soft utensils) for mouthing and chewing.
- Encourage lots of touching, feeling and exploring a variety of foods, including getting messy and tasting purees from their tray.
- Encourage play and experimentation with a spoon (grasping spoon and bringing to mouth).
- Encourage your child to hold their bottle independently

Encouraging Oral Motor and Self-Feeding Skills

- Gradually increase the texture of foods (between 6 and 9 months is often a good time to try mashed and lumpy textures, and very soft finger foods).
- Oral motor movements and chewing develop as child gains experience with soft foods.
- With close supervision, if you feel it is safe for you child you can encourage “gnawing” on wide stick-shaped solids that you know your child cannot bite off a piece (e.g. carrot, pepperette or pickle that are at least as wide as a marker), or on a slice of apple wrapped in cheese cloth where the child can chew and get the taste, but the food stays safely inside the fabric.
- When ready, try dissolvable crackers, Mum Mum cookies, or dissolvable “Puffs” that help to teach munching, but melt in your child’s mouth if they do not chew them properly.
- Encourage your child to participate in feeding themselves including picking up solids, or bringing a filled spoon to their mouth.
- Introduce drinking from a cup with handles (if using an open cup, start with a very small amount of water in the bottom of the cup for practice).

Steps in the Development of Utensil and Drinking Skills

- Child closes lips on spoon to remove food and swallows with closed mouth.
- Child scoops and feeds self with spoon, with many spills.
- Child picks up and drinks from cup (some spilling).
- Child drinks from cup without help.
- Child sucks through a straw.
- Child begins to use a fork.

Choosing Utensils, Dishes and Cups

- Choose short, thick handled spoons as they are more comfortable and easier to control.
- Encourage child to hold their dish with one hand while using the spoon in the other; bowls with non-slip bottoms and lipped edges encourage success.
- Starter cups (i.e., with spout or lid) are a good way to introduce independent cup drinking. (*recessed lid).

Toileting

Independence in toileting depends on the child's physical and emotional readiness. It is important that the parent respect the child's feelings, or lack of understanding, yet continue to and communicate expectations and beliefs in their child's abilities. Reinforce only success.

Encouraging Readiness for Toileting

- Parent must be ready to invest the amount of time require for consistency of routine to encourage toileting.
- Encourage child to indicate need to toilet or express discomfort of a soiled diaper.
- Child should be remaining dry for short periods of time (approx. 2 hours).

- Child should have regular/predictable bowel movements.
- Encourage understanding of what is expected.

Bathing

As motor skills progress, it is important to encourage independence for getting into/out of tub, and bathing/washing.

Encouraging Bathing Readiness

- Encourage standing and balance.
- Encourage side stepping, weight shifting, etc.
- Encourage learning of body parts.
- Encourage use of face cloth or terry cloth mitt to wash/scrub body.

Getting In and Out of the Tub

- Do a dry run first to solve unexpected problems.
- Use a non-slip mat in and out of the tub and place a damp towel on the side of the tub to prevent slipping.
- Guide your child into the tub by encouraging one leg over the edge of the tub at a time, once standing in the tub with both feet gently guide to a seated position.
- Adaptive equipment may be required to facilitate getting in and out of the tub and could be addressed by an occupational therapist.