



## Encouraging Independent Behavior

As your child grows, she will be able to do more and more things on her own. With your help and support, your child will learn many tasks – getting dressed, eating, using the bathroom, making some decisions, and playing independently, just to name a few. While your child will not be able to do everything that an adult can do, being able to do things by herself, makes her feel good about herself, successful and self-confident.

### INFANT:

- Give your infant time to be by her self, either lying on the floor, sitting in a “bouncy seat,” or playing in the swing. Place safe toys within reach. Watch your child practice making sounds, moving his arms and legs, exploring, or reaching for toys.
- Encourage your child to grasp a toy you are offering to her and smile and clap when she takes hold of it. Encourage her to give it back to you. Do this a few times so that your child understands that if she gives it to you, you will give it back to her. This will build trust between you and your child.

### TODDLER:

- Give your toddler lots of time to practice using a fork, spoon and cup. Try foods that are easy to get with fork or scoop with a spoon: bananas, mashed potatoes, or oatmeal. Be sure to show your toddler what to do.
- Encourage your toddler to dress himself, but give him help when he needs it. For example, your child might be able to pull up his pants, but will need or your help to zipper them. Or, your child may start to put on his socks, but need help getting the heel in the right place or pulling them up. When choosing clothes for your child, be sure that he can easily use the bathroom independently throughout the day.
- Give your toddler time to draw, sing, or play alone. Your child is very creative and will be able to find ways of having fun on her own. Keep books, toys, and art materials easily accessible so that she can reach them herself.

### PRESCHOOLERS:

- Encourage your preschooler to use words to express herself. For example, if your child would like another glass of milk at the dinner table, wait until he asks for it before giving it to her.
- Have your child put away toys and materials before moving from one activity to another.
- Encourage your child to help you around the house. Let your child sweep, dust, put away clean clothes, or match the clean socks.

### Book Suggestion

*Little by Little*. Amber Stewart & Layn Marlow. Orchard Books, 2008.

*ParentTips* is a monthly resource for parents with young children.  
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