



Teaching Self-Help Skills

Self-help skills are the skills children need to take care of themselves everyday. Some skills include: dressing, self-feeding, using the restroom, using good health & safety practices, or following rules and directions. Children begin to build these skills from a very young age, but should master them prior to starting kindergarten. Here's how you can help your child develop some important self-help skills:

YOUR INFANT (birth to 2 years old):

- Give your infant time to play alone, while you watch from a safe distance. Lay your infant on the floor, sit her in a "bouncy seat" or a swing. Place safe toys within reach. Watch as your child practices making sounds, moving her arms and legs, or reaching for toys.
- Let your child practice self-feeding. Try foods that he can pick up (Cheerios™, pasta, banana slices) or easily get with a spoon (mashed potatoes, oatmeal).
- Help older infants 'clean up' their toys or books after they are used. Show her where each object goes. Make a game of cleaning up the room by seeing who can put things away the quickest. Try singing songs while you work.

YOUR TODDLER (2-3 year olds):

- Give your toddler lots of time to practice using a fork, spoon and cup. Offer a cup *without* a lid or straw frequently.
- Encourage your toddler to use words to express herself. For example, if your child wants another glass of milk or more of the snack, wait until she asks for it using her words before giving it to her.
- Have your child start to get dressed/undressed on his own. Help may be needed to get into certain clothes, button, snap, or zip, but practice makes perfect!
- Teach your child to sneeze/cough into his elbow to prevent disease and reduce sickness.
- Encourage your child to wash hands after using the restroom, before snacks/meals and when cooking or touching food. Sing a song when washing hands, such as *Happy Birthday*. This helps her to learn how long she needs to wash her hands in order to kill the germs.
- Engage your child in easy housework. Young children love to help! Let him sweep, dust, put clothes into a dresser drawer, or match the clean socks.

YOUR PRESCHOOLER (4 year olds):

- Play games, such as Chutes & Ladders™, Candy Land™, or Memory™, to help your child learn to follow rules and other important social skills, like taking turns.
- Have a tea party. Let your child practice pouring liquid into the cups, using manners, like please and thank you, and having conversations.
- Show your child how to comb her hair and wash her face; encourage your child to do this each morning and evening.
- Use a timer when brushing teeth; dentists recommend that parents brush the teeth of children under 7, letting kids practice with the toothbrush and 'finish up' after the real brushing is done.
- Role-play (rehearse) key social skills, like meeting a new person, using polite conversations, or what to do when friends are not getting along. Use stuffed animals to act out the different scenarios.
- Arrange play dates for your child. Play dates can happen at your house, at the other child's home, or in a public place, such as a park or library. Play dates give your child a chance to practice important social or friendship skills.

Book Suggestion

The Little Engine That Could by Watty Piper and Loren Long