Ways to Encourage Self-Help Skills in Children

Child care providers can help young children become independent by allowing and encouraging them to take responsibility for themselves whenever possible. It can be faster and less messy to do things for children, but they learn so much from doing things for themselves. When children practice self-help skills such as feeding and dressing themselves, they practice their large and small motor skills,



Self-feeding

- [ ] The best way to build independent feeding skills is to learn the normal developmental stages of self-feeding. Encourage children to practice feeding themselves from infancy on. Begin by offering older infants finger foods. Introduce a spoon and fork and give children plenty of time to practice. Let children be as independent as possible during mealtimes. Give them the tools they need to be successful. Consider bowls that attach to the table, child-sized utensils and small cups with handles and spouts (such as measuring cups) for pouring. Encourage children to try for themselves but provide help and encouragement when needed so they don't get frustrated.

Independent dressing and grooming

- [ ] Encourage children to dress and groom by themselves; just provide minimal assistance. Begin with older infants and toddlers by encouraging them to help pull socks on and off, pull up pants after diapering and help put their arms through sleeves. As children get older, encourage them to dress themselves but help with challenging steps such as zipping and buttoning

Hygiene and toileting

- [ ] Look for signs of readiness for toileting. Encourage children learning to use the toilet to climb on and off the toilet seat, pull clothing up and down, and wash their hands independently. Also teach children how to brush their teeth after lunch and snacks. Be ready to provide support and help if they need it. You can find more suggestions at Keeping Children's Teeth Clean in Child Care and Hand Washing in Child Care. Encouraging children to take care of everyday hygiene routines and to use the toilet independently helps them learn how to become more independent and self-sufficient, and frees up your time

to help children with other activities.

Helping with daily chores like table setting and picking up toys

- [ ] Encourage children to help with clean-up early on. Give toddlers responsibility for placing napkins or utensils on the table. Encourage children to begin clearing their own plates when they are old enough to carry them without dropping them. When children are involved in regular chores starting before the age of 4, they tend to be more independent in early adulthood than children without the experience of helping out.

- [ ] Self-help skills are worth the time and effort in a child care program. The secret to success is to give children age-appropriate experiences and provide the appropriate supports to help children be successful. Child care providers can offer opportunities for children to develop self-help skills and give them ample time to work on these important tasks. Remember that adults are important role models. We model self-help skills; children learn [illegible] from watching us.

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