

The Early Years Teams Top Tips – Self-care and independence:

Break tasks into simple steps

Teach self-care tasks by breaking them down into small, manageable steps. For example, when teaching handwashing, guide your child through turning on the tap, wetting hands, applying soap, and rinsing. Gradual instruction makes learning more achievable.

Use visual or verbal prompts

Use picture cards or verbal cues to remind your child of the steps in daily routines, like brushing teeth or getting dressed. Visual or verbal reminders help them remember what to do next and build independence.

Encourage self-feeding

Allow your child to feed themselves with easy-to-hold utensils or finger foods. Start with meals that are less messy and gradually increase complexity. This promotes motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and independence in eating.

Create accessible spaces

Arrange your home so that essential items like clothes, shoes, and toys are within your child's reach. This allows them to practice independent dressing, choosing toys, or getting ready, without always relying on adult assistance.

Offer limited choices

Provide your child with two or three simple choices, like which clothes to wear or what snack to have. This empowers them to make decisions, fostering independence and boosting confidence in self-care activities.

Model and narrate self-care

Demonstrate self-care tasks, such as brushing teeth or washing hands, while narrating each step aloud. Children learn by watching and imitating, and your clear verbal guidance will help them understand the process.

Allow time for practice

Give your child extra time to practice self-care skills, even if it takes longer than when you do it for them. Patience is key to allowing them to develop these skills at their own pace without feeling rushed or pressured.

Incorporate play into self-care

Turn self-care tasks into fun, playful activities. For example, you could sing a “tidy-up song” while cleaning or pretend to race while getting dressed. This makes routines more engaging and encourages children to participate willingly.

Use adaptive tools

If needed introduce child-friendly tools, like easy-grip toothbrushes, wide-handled cutlery, or Velcro shoes, to help your child become more independent. These adaptive items make it easier for them to complete tasks on their own.

Celebrate small achievements

Celebrate every step towards independence, no matter how small. Whether it’s pulling on their socks or using a spoon, acknowledging these successes builds your child’s confidence and motivates them to keep practicing.