



Play and Learning 12

Self-care

Developing everyday self-care skills, like dressing and going to the toilet, is an important part of child development.

- **Children who are encouraged to have a go** at everyday self-care skills, and are given the time and support to learn to do these themselves, **show more initiative and confidence** in their play and learning.
- Independence in self-care skills also **helps your child when starting something new**, like kindergarten or pre-school.

When it comes to self-care:

- **babies** show the beginnings of self-care skills when they put their hands on the bottle or cup as they are being fed, or as they begin to hold onto a spoon or eat simple finger foods.
- **toddlers** want to have a go at washing and drying themselves, cleaning their teeth, brushing their hair, packing away toys and taking off their clothes. Toddlers will also be developing their toileting skills.
- **young children** can carry out more tasks on their own, although you still need to encourage and supervise them.

What you can do

- Make routine, everyday tasks a **fun time**.
- Reassure your child that **mistakes are OK** and **praise their attempts** at self-care.
- **Break down tasks into small steps** – ‘You put your shoe on your foot, and I will tie the laces for you’.
- Allow **plenty of time for each task** and **opportunity for repetition** as your child becomes independent in self-care.

Some activities to try

- **Working backwards** can help to teach tricky tasks by breaking activities into easy, manageable steps.

Ask your child to complete the very last step of the task (pulling their sock off after you have pulled it down over their ankle).

Once they master the last step, introduce the second last step, and so on. This way, your child is successful at the end of the task and avoids frustration.



Some activities to try (continued)



- **Talk about what you are doing** as you do it – ‘Now we’ll wash your face’.
- **Let your child watch you** and other family members carry out self-care tasks – like Dad having a shave or brushing his teeth.
- **Set up for success** – make tasks simple enough for your child to do, such as cutting food up into bite-size pieces so they can use a fork, or having a special box to pack away toys.
- Use equipment to make tasks easier and safer – high sided bowls and cups with lids to reduce spills, child-size cutlery, foot stools to reach the sink, little steps, and a toilet seat to make toileting feel safe, clothing with bigger buttons, and shoes with Velcro fastening.
- A daily routine helps older children organise themselves to carry out self-care tasks. Use simple charts with pictures or words to remind them what to do next.
- A dress-up box is a fun way to practice ties, button, laces, zips, clasps. Let your child play with your old clothes, bags, shoes, hats, and scarves, or dress a doll or teddy.

Keeping your child safe

- Supervise your child closely at all times especially around water, play equipment, or when using objects such as scissors, pencils, glue or paint. Avoid flammable or toxic materials.
- Babies, toddlers and young children can choke on small toys and objects. Regularly check toys to make sure they are safe and in good condition.
 - Toys should be bigger than a 20 cent coin.
 - Strings on toys should be less than 20 centimetres long.
- Do a safety check and make sure your home is safe for your child to actively explore..

Find out more

For more information on play, learning, and a range of other topics, visit:

- playgroupwa.com.au
- raisingchildren.net.au
- bringingupgreatkids.org
- cahs.health.wa.gov.au/childhealthresources

For more information about the metropolitan **Child Development Service** phone 1300 551 827 or visit cahs.health.wa.gov.au/childdevelopment

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