

Independence

Independence is the ability to do things for ourselves and think for ourselves. Your child becomes independent through her own activity. What should you let your child do? By being included in simple daily activities, she begins to understand routines, her role in the family, and her own abilities. When you offer choices at the right times and only lend a hand when she needs help, you are saying to her, "I know you can do this by yourself." She gains skills, confidence, and an 'I can do it' attitude, which she will take with her throughout her life.



Your child will be on the path to independence when you follow these three key principles:

- 1 Create an accessible environment.**
- 2 Show your child how to do daily activities that lead to independence.**
- 3 Make time.**



By creating an accessible environment, showing her how to do things, and making time, you will place your child on the path to independence. Have the patience to wait for your child to do things for herself. Slow down your activities into small steps so she can watch and imitate your movements. Busy parents with full schedules may struggle to find the time. It is faster to buckle your child into her seatbelt, dress her, feed her, and keep her in nappies (diapers). Everyone has times when they can't wait for her to do it herself. But when you can wait for her to practice what she has learned, she will become her own person and amaze you with her ability to care for herself independently.

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10

Ten things you can do at home to encourage independence

Independence in Dressing

1. Offer clothes that allow for independence: shirts that easily pull over her head, bottoms with an elastic waist, Velcro-style fastenings, and snap fastenings that she can do for herself.
2. Make a few choices of your child's clothes accessible by hanging a low bar at child height for clothes on hangers. Provide a child-sized basket or hamper for dirty clothes.
3. Provide a low mirror and a child-sized brush and comb for combing hair.

Independence in Toileting

4. Your child should have access to a small toilet chair, which is different from using a stool to climb up and sit on the family toilet. (A stool to the toilet works very well once she is toilet-trained and climbing one or two stairs independently.) She needs to feel secure when manoeuvring onto and sitting on the toilet, not at all concerned that she might fall in.
5. Provide a stool for access to the sink for hand-washing and tooth-brushing. This stool could also serve as a low seat for changing underpants.

Independence in Eating

6. Empty a low kitchen cabinet for your child's small drinking glasses, a small jug (pitcher), bowls, plates, spoons, and forks, each with their own place or container in that cupboard.
7. When choosing dishes, find child-sized versions made of breakable materials, not plastic. Your child will learn how to handle objects with care by occasionally dropping something that breaks. Breakage should be handled in a matter-of-fact manner, without anger or scolding. Children quickly learn to hold dishes with care.
8. Children are more likely to eat something if they have helped prepare the food. Small children can peel a mandarin orange or a banana if you start them off.

Independence in Sleeping

9. A low bed from the beginning gives your child the freedom to move around. It allows her to wake up and crawl off the bed in the morning. Toys placed on a low shelf will often catch her attention upon waking.
10. Create a routine that helps your child understand that it is bedtime. The routine may differ in every family, but whatever you choose, make sure it is one of diminishing activity: Play time, bath time, story time, sleep time works perfectly. Story time, bath time, play time, sleep time is a recipe for conflict!



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