
Developing Children’s Self-Care Skills by Overcoming Learned Helplessness

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the article, “Why Every Parent Needs to Know About Learned Helplessness,” from Parent Map. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Understand the connections between trauma or negative experiences and learned helplessness.
- ◆ Reflect on your current practices and use the suggestions provided in the article to support children’s confidence around their self-care skills.
- ◆ Develop a plan to support the self-care skills of children in your care who have experienced trauma.

Activity

- ◆ Read the article.
- ◆ After reading, use the questions below to guide your reflection and action plan to support children to develop self-care skills.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support self-care skills.

“Our past experiences influence our behavior, and when those experiences have been consistently negative, we can adopt what has been described as learned helplessness.”

Sanya Pelini, Ph.D.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the article? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?

- ◆ While this article is meant for families, it provides helpful insight into providing support for children who develop learned helplessness as it relates to self-care skills. According to Pelini, learned helplessness often develops as a result of repeated negative experiences that leave a child feeling powerless. Children who develop learned helplessness may not ask for help or may lack confidence in their abilities to perform self-care tasks.
 - Consider the children in your care who have experienced trauma. In what ways may their experiences impact their confidence to perform self-care tasks in your learning environment?
 - How do these children respond to failure or challenge during self-care tasks? Do children persist or ask for help? Do they become frustrated or avoid challenging tasks? How do you respond to children when faced with such challenges?

- ◆ The article provides suggestions for ways to support children to overcome learned helplessness following a traumatic or negative experience. Reflect on your practices.
 - How do you respond to children who display signs of learned helplessness during self-care tasks?
 - What are you currently doing to support children's development of self-care skills?
 - How can you modify your support to help children feel confident during self-care tasks, such as feeding, dressing, or toileting? Consider the suggestions provided in the article. Can you...
 - Model positive self-talk?
 - Acknowledge their effort?
 - Observe and acknowledge their strengths?
 - Provide lots of opportunities for success?
 - How do you think these strategies will impact children's confidence during self-care tasks?
 - What other strategies do you think will improve children's confidence in their self-care abilities?

- ◆ Create an action plan to support the children in your care who have experienced trauma and display signs of learned helplessness to feel more confident in performing self-care tasks.
 - Determine a self-care skill or task that is developmentally appropriate for the child.
 - Use the suggestions provided from the article, as well as your own expertise, to offer support.
 - Monitor children's progress and modify support as needed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about self-care:

- ◆ **Source:** TATS Talks with Families
 - ◆ **Article:** Helping Your Child Develop Independence Self-Care Skills
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://tats.ucf.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2017/11/Adaptive-in-home-number-3-all-skills.pdf>
 - ◆ **Description:** This article provides suggestions for supporting children’s self-care skills in the home and in your learning environment.
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- ◆ **Source:** Sesame Street
 - ◆ **Handout:** Digging Deep: Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family – During and After a Disaster or Crisis
 - ◆ **Link:** https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/SW18_Digging-Deep_R3-1.pdf
 - ◆ **Description:** Young children learn resilience and self-care by watching the adults in their lives take care of themselves. This handout provides strategies and tips for families or caregivers to take care of themselves during or after a crisis.