

CORE SKILL: MOVE

Self-Care



What You Need to Know

Young children are driven to be independent and to do things on their own. Many want to feed, dress, and toilet on their own as much as possible. As any teacher of toddlers will confirm, with this emerging sense-of-self and growing independence – “I can do it!” – often comes with some defiance. This is typical behavior that should not be punished nor ignored, as it’s a reflection of a child’s desire to be in control of their self. You can celebrate and support children’s need for independence (and build their confidence!) by allowing and encouraging children to take responsibility for themselves whenever they can, especially with self-care skills.

Collaborate with families to support the development of self-care skills. Be mindful and respectful of each family’s cultural values and perspectives related to feeding, dressing, cleaning up, etc.

Things to Consider

Consider this classroom example of a missed opportunity to promote self-care skills:

- ◆ *The teachers are concerned about making children wait too long as they prepare to go outside (because it often leads to challenging behaviors), so they split up and quickly go down the line and put on children’s coats for them.*

That was an example of how a well-intentioned, productive teaching team is missing an opportunity to promote self-care skills. Now consider this scenario where children are *also* engaged with minimal wait time, but still get to try on their own:

- ◆ *One teacher leads the group in a song or book on the carpet, while the other calls a few children over at a time to get ready to go outside. They encourage each child to do as much as they can independently. For some children this is just picking up the coat or putting one arm in the coat, while others may do all that **and** some Velcro. The teacher offers scaffolding as needed based on the individual child’s level of skill.*

Development of Self-Help Skills

| Between 9 and 18 months, children may: | Between 16 and 36 months, children may: |
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| Anticipate and cooperate in daily routines, such as washing hands, blowing nose, or holding a toothbrush with assistance from adults. | Participate in health care routines with more independence, such as washing hands, blowing nose, brushing teeth, or drinking from a cup. |
| Use hand-eye coordination for more complex actions, such as releasing objects into a container, stacking cups, or picking up pieces of food one by one. | Accept adult guidance, support, and protection when encountering unsafe situations. Learn some differences between safe and unsafe play, such as not to stand on chairs or tables, or not to put small objects in mouth. |
| | Observe others making things happen to understand the cause-and-effect relationship of intention and action, such as seeing an adult prepare to go outside and then going to get their own jacket. |
| | Use hand-eye coordination when participating in routines, play, and activities, such as putting on a mitten, painting at an easel, putting pieces of a puzzle together, or folding paper. |

Setting the Stage

Provide time and space for children to try to be as independent as possible (with scaffolding). For example:

- ◆ Routines: let children put on coats/shoes, get backpacks, serve self at Mealtime, clean up, wash hands, or select and gather materials needed for a planned activity (or something they are choosing to do).
- ◆ Classroom environment: items are on low shelves, visuals charts hanging, and pictures on bins so children can clean independently.



Intentional Teaching Practices to Promote Self-Care Skills

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| OBSERVE | <p>OBSERVE</p> <p>Step back and observe children (and your behaviors). Look for ways that children are displaying self-care skills. Consider who can do what at what level, and how you could provide support (without taking over). Also, look for opportunities for children to take some control in your classroom environment and routines. Are you reaching everything for them? Can they bring you a diaper if needed? Or clean-up their toys? Are you washing their hands or pulling up their pants for them after using the bathroom or getting a diaper change? Consider small changes you can make to support their growing skills.</p> |
| FOCUS | <p>Narrate Using Self-Help Skills</p> <p>Model and narrate children’s (and your own) use of self-care skills. Use this to acknowledge their use of skills, but also as a way to explain and demonstrate how to do things.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Ugh! My hands are all sticky and I don’t like the way that feels. I’m going to use the soap and water to wash them clean. See how I push my fingers through each other to get them all clean?”◆ “I see you are working very hard to get your arm in that coat. You can do it!” |
| SCAFFOLD I | <p>Use Visuals and Songs</p> <p>Use visuals and songs to help children complete tasks independently.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Children follow a handwashing chart and/or song that leads them through the steps.◆ You place pictures of the blocks on the bin so that children know where the blocks belong and can put them away on their own. |
| SCAFFOLD II | <p>Promote Child Autonomy</p> <p>The key to developing self-care skills is exercising patience and letting children complete as much as possible independently. While this might be messier, take longer, and not get done the way you’d do it, avoid the urge to jump in right away. Let children go at their own pace and notice who can do what on their own and how well. Then, provide the correct amount of scaffolding to help children where they are (which will be different for each child!).</p> <p>Child autonomy can also include communicating when they need help getting their wants and needs met. Provide children with visuals to prompt them to request help/bathroom/etc. or model these requests for the child to imitate. Keep visuals/communication boards available to support nonverbal children to communicate about adaptive/self-care needs (i.e., bathroom, sickness, clothing, etc.).</p> |
| KEEP IT GOING | <p>Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines.</p> |