

CORE SKILL: MOVE

Self-Care



What You Need to Know

Preschoolers are increasingly able to take responsibility for their own self-care. They are building an awareness of personal hygiene (e.g., need for clean hands, clean bodies, and teeth), showing an increasing independence with daily routines and safety practices, and knowing when and how to ask for help. Their strengthening fine motor skills allow them to navigate more complex tasks (e.g., zipping, squeezing, tying). While some children embrace their growing independence, others may need a little extra time and support to get used to doing things on their own. You can support Self-Care skills by encouraging children to take responsibility for themselves when they can. You will gently push them to take care of themselves and the classroom while providing *just* enough support for them to be successful.

Things to Consider

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

- ◆ The teachers are concerned that children can't handle the lunch food and materials without spreading germs or spilling/wasting. They want to maximize the time children have to relax and eat. So, they involve the children by singing songs and talking about the food as they pre-distribute the portions and serve the plates.

That was an example of how a well-intentioned teaching team missed an opportunity to promote self-care skills. Now consider this scenario where children are encouraged to actively use their self-care skills:

- ◆ One teacher reads to a group, while others wash their hands independently and then set the table for all. They work with the 2nd teacher to place the food in large bowls at each table. The other children wash their hands and join them at the table. The children pass the food to each other, serving themselves and pouring their own drinks. One child spills, gets a napkin, and cleans it up independently. After the meal, they put their plates in the bin, wipe down their own spot, and get in line to wash their hands.

Development of Self-Care Skills

Between 36 and 48 months, children may:	Between 48 and 60 months, children may:
Show an awareness of personal hygiene and self-care skills. May not complete or exhibit these skills regularly without adult guidance.	Begin to take more responsibility for personal hygiene and self-care skills. Sometimes completes them without adult prompting.
Show awareness of a growing number of personal safety practices and routines. Look to adults for support in enacting these.	Exhibit increasing independence in following basic personal safety practices and routines. Follows adult guidance around more complex practices.

Setting the Stage

Activities and routines that promote the development of Self-Care skills:

- ◆ **Routines:** Let children check in a mirror after lunch and if needed, clean their own faces; put on coats/shoes; put own papers into their backpacks; set the table and serve self at mealtime; put out their own mats; clean-up; wash hands independently; select and gather materials needed for a planned activity (or something they are choosing to do).
- ◆ **Classroom environment:** keep items on low shelves, use visuals charts and communication boards, and have pictures on bins so children can clean independently.
- ◆ Explicitly explore and discuss **safety practices** by engaging children in meaningful conversations about *why* certain rules exist and *how* they keep us safe (e.g., talk through the existence of germs – how they transfer and why soap works; practice crossing a street outside and look around/discuss *why* you look both ways and hold hands).



Intentional Teaching Practices to Promote Self-Care Skills

OBSERVE	OBSERVE Step back and observe children. Look for ways that children display their self-care skills. Consider who can do what at what level and how you could provide support (without taking over). Who goes to the bathroom independently without asking? Who cleans up a spill without being prompted? Are there some that seem to ask for excessive help (and maybe don't feel confident in their ability to complete tasks and can use some extra support)? Are there opportunities for them to do things on their own and take responsibility?
FOCUS	Narrate Using Self-Help Skills Model and narrate children's (and your own) use of self-help skills. Use this to acknowledge their use of skills, but also as a way to explain and demonstrate how to do things. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ "Your hands were sticky, so you went to the sink to wash them! You're taking care of your body."◆ "You stopped and froze when you saw that broken glass. You knew it wasn't safe."◆ Demonstrate: "Watch how I use the brush to get at the teeth all the way in the back."
SCAFFOLD I	Use Visuals and Songs Use visuals and songs to help children complete tasks independently. <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 children know where they belong and can put away on their own.◆ Children follow a schedule/list of the end-of-day routine (go to the bathroom, wash hands, put on coat and hat, put papers in backpack). Visuals can also help children communicate when they need help getting their needs and wants met. Provide children with visuals to prompt them to request for 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.).
SCAFFOLD II	Promote Child Autonomy Exercising patience and letting children complete as much as possible independently is important for developing self-care skills. 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 them where they are (which will be different for each child!). Child autonomy can also include providing choices for children who may have limited physical mobility or other disabilities so they can participate in self-care routines and show autonomy through their preferences (i.e., "do you want to put on your gloves or your hat first?").
KEEP IT GOING	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.