

Self-Help and Chore Skills

This handout contains checklists for necessary skill sets and recommended chores for children with developmental ages of 2 through 10+ years. This handout also provides brief explanations of the developmental perspectives and helpful hints to assist in your child's development of these necessary skills.

If your child is older than 10 years of age, review all checklists to be sure you have covered these fundamental self-help skills and independent chores with them. After your child learns the skills, make sure that you work to remove prompts. They are not independent nor responsible for performing the skill or task if you are prompting them to initiate the task or cueing them through the steps. If you have further questions, please contact your NACD coach.

There are three checklists total for the three main areas to encourage self-help skills in a child:

1. Independence and competence in eating and preparing food*
2. Independence and competence in toileting, dressing, and grooming
3. Independence and competence in typical household in daily chores

*This independence refers to a child's ability to manually obtain food or liquid and then bring it to his/her mouth as a motor action based on development and sequential abilities. This does NOT refer to a child's ability to manipulate food and liquid once in the mouth. For that skill one should seek the expertise of NACD's speech-language pathologist, Lori Riggs.

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Independence and Competence in Eating and Preparing Food

Listed below are skill sets that are developmentally arranged in groups for typical ages. However they must be modified to fit a child's sequential processing abilities. Motor skills should also be considered when picking the appropriate skill set for each child.

Age 2

- Holds small cup with one or two hands (cup with 2 handles may be required at first)
- Brings cup to mouth and drinks (cup-to-lips action), although may spill
- Can hold small, plastic child's spoon and do some feeding (metal may be too heavy; spoon with handle not too long will help child approximate spoon-to-mouth better)
- Can grasp finger foods and may begin pinching things like Cheerios or raisins
- Can eat solid food, such as cooked vegetable and chopped meats.

*Usually high chair or some seat with strap and buckle would be appropriate

Age 3

- Holds cup with one hand
- Brings cup to mouth and can drink with minimal to no spills
- Sucks from straw
- Can use spoon and fork to manipulate and obtain food off plate/bowl; may spill
- Can use napkin to keep in lap and use to wipe food from mouth
- Can eat independently with family after food is cut in bite-sized portions
- Can locate and obtain finger foods in pantry if at child height (cereal, crackers, etc)
- Can spread independently (like peanut butter on bread using dull children's butter knife)
- *Usually a booster seat right to family table would be appropriate

Age 4

- Begins to practice pouring from shallow pitcher or lightweight container
- Can use napkin appropriately
- Can drink from cup with no spills
- Can eat with spoon and fork without any spills
- Can obtain own drink of water if stool is in place to stand on to reach faucet
- Can independently serve self at table with little or no spills
- Can cut soft foods with edge of fork

*May need food cut in small pieces if tough (like meats)

*May require booster seat if table is still too high to reach

Age 5-6

- Can independently obtain own snacks like yogurt, fruit, crackers, etc.
- Can independently wash own apples, open own yogurt, obtain own utensil, etc.
- Can independently obtain stool to use for reaching high things on counters and in pantry
- Can independently obtain own drink and can pour from regular pitcher into cup
- Can independently make easy meals like sandwich (spread peanut butter and honey on bread, use butter knife to cut into 2 pieces, put on own plate) or cereal and pour milk
- Can independently make and pack sack lunches to have for school
- Can help parent with meal planning, grocery shopping, and meal preparations
- Is careful around the stove, fireplace, and other hot objects
- Is careful around sharp objects like scissors and knives
- Independently cleans up his/her mess after eating
- Can sit and behave appropriately through a family meal

Age 7-10

- Can independently prepare own simple meal
- Can independently use small kitchen appliances such as a toaster or can opener
- Can independently use microwave
- Can independently use stove WITH adult supervision
- Can independently cut food on own plate with fork and knife
- Could potentially use kitchen knife to help adult with food preparation WITH supervision
- Can independently plan a meal, shop for the groceries (may need supervision), and prepare that meal (may also require supervision, depending on child)
- Can independently plan weekly lunches, make them, and pack them daily for school
- Can use eating utensils and napkins appropriately
- Can sit appropriately throughout a meal and participate in family conversation

Age 10+

- Independent in meal planning
- Independent in meal preparation
- Independent with use of kitchen tools including small appliances, knives, and cookware
- Is aware of and competent in appropriate social/table decorum

Five ways to build a child's independence while preparing food and eating:

1. Understand the sequence in which a child develops the above skills. If a child does not have the bimanual skills to hold bread with one hand and spread peanut butter with the other, that skill set may be too advanced for their abilities. Generally each skill set should be mastered before a child can move to the more advanced set.
2. Provide the child with many opportunities (high frequency) to develop these skills. Let the child be as independent as possible during meal planning, preparation, and eating. A child must be provided with a lot of experiences in each skill set for mastery and progression.
3. Appropriately model each skill set and then allow your child time to perform each task. It is very important that a child sees appropriate behaviors and modeling to learn how to use utensils, use a napkin, sit and attend at mealtime, etc. An adult or older child must provide good modeling for a young child to learn these skills. Also, while engaged in the activities, allow the child time to process the experience and practice the skills.
4. Provide the child appropriate feedback regarding their performance on the task. Be sure to praise children who attempt new skills and engage in activities that promote independence. Children who receive positive feedback for efforts and accomplishments will be motivated to practice new skills. Initially disregard messes as young children learn eating independence. For children older than 2, model how to clean up messes and allow them to independently clean messes up following meal preparation and eating.
5. Repetition: High frequency is required when developing and mastering any skill.

Independence and Competence in Toileting, Dressing, and Grooming

Listed below are skill sets that are developmentally arranged in groups for typical ages. However, they must be modified to fit a child's sequential processing abilities. Motor skills should also be considered when picking the appropriate skill set for each child.

Age 2

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE: At this age and processing level, your child will not be able to accomplish self-care skills independently. However, you can still encourage them to participate in the activity and verbally explain the steps as you do them. This will help your toddler process the steps and learn to become more independent in dressing, self-care, etc.

- Can take off hat, socks, and shoes without laces
- Can unzip and zip up large zippers with adult holding bottom of zipper
- Can take off underwear and pants with elastic waist
- Can rub hands together once sanitizer has been squirted in hand
- Can independently open mouth to allow parent to brush teeth
- Can get own diaper and wipes to bring to parent for changing (if kept in same place and at child's height, like on a shelf in the closet)
- Lets someone know when he/she has wet or soiled diaper or pants.
- Verbally anticipates and vocalizes bowel or bladder activity
- Will sit on child-sized potty chair with or without productivity (interest is the first step)
- Can blow nose into tissue held by adult
- Can do some body washing in the bathtub

Helpful hints:

1. Verbally prepare your child for the activity. "Johnny, we are going to change your diaper now." Ask your child for help in a 2-step command. Point to the diapers and say, "Johnney, go get a diaper and bring it to me, please."
2. If dressing, verbally explain the process. "Let's put on your shirt. Put your arms up and through the sleeve. Your right arm first and now your left. Now pull it down," and so forth. Ask child, "What else do we need?" Let them think about what else is needed when getting dressed and verbalize it to you.
3. In the bathtub, apply a small amount of soap on your child's hand and let them wash independently.
4. When speaking to a child at this developmental level, it is often helpful to pause and provide your child the opportunity to process one piece of information before providing the next. Give your child plenty of time to process what you have said before repeating a direction.

Age 3

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE: At this age children typically show interest in many of their own self-care tasks such as dressing, brushing teeth, washing hands, and becoming toilet trained.

- Can independently choose between 2 outfits to wear each day
- Can independently zip front-opening clothes (may require parent to place zipper initially)
- Can independently put on simple clothes such as underwear and pants with elastic waist and pull-over shirts
- Can independently find mates for socks and shoes
- Can undo simple fasteners like laces, snaps, buckles, and belts
- Can button large buttons
- Can independently put arms in shirt or coat that is held by adult
- Can independently put tub toys in basket held by adult following bath time
- Can independently distinguish between the fronts and back of clothes, the inside and outside of clothes, what goes on top (shirt) and what goes on legs, feet, etc.
- Can wash hands with verbal cueing (parent still may need to put soap in hands, turn on water, get stool so child can reach faucet)
- Can independently cover mouth when coughing and sneezing with verbal cueing
- Can blow nose into self-held tissue with adult assistance and prompting
- May begin daytime toilet control, using a toileting schedule and verbal prompt
- May verbalize the need to "go potty" and initiate self-toileting
- May become toilet trained during day and use diapers/pull-ups at night

Helpful hints for toilet training:

Toilet training is a goal to work on at this level of development and processing. Here are some ideas to make it more successful:

1. Smaller, portable potty chairs work well for independence.
2. Pull-up training pants encourage independence.
3. Routine verbal prompts from parent help a young child develop self-awareness.
4. Set up a simple reward system like sticker chart above toilet.

Age 4

- Can independently pick between 3-5 outfits to wear each day
- Can independently dress self using pants and shirts with simple fasteners
- Can independently put on socks and shoes (with no laces)
- Can independently brush teeth with toothpaste set-up
- Can independently cover mouth when coughing or sneezing without verbal prompt
- Can independently blow nose into self-held tissue with adult verbal prompt
- Can independently bathe in tub after adult sets water level and temperature
- Can independently put tub toys in basket following bath with verbal prompts
- Can wash self in bath with set-up (soap squirted in child's hand)
- Can begin using comb or brush for hair (could practice on adult or doll)
- Can find and obtain own coat and put on with adult holding it
- Can independently use toilet including flushing; may need help wiping
- Can independently turn on water faucet if stool is provided to reach
- Can independently wash hands before eating, after toileting, after coughing or sneezing, or following playing outside (will need verbal reminders)
- Independence with toileting during day; may still need diaper or pull-up at night

*May begin waking up at night to use toilet (nightlight in bathroom helps)

*May not vocalize need for adult supervision in bathroom, which may be required (need help wiping, need help reaching faucet, etc.)

Age 5-6

- Can independently pick from weather-appropriate outfits to wear each day
- Can independently dress self using most if not all fasteners
- Can independently put on socks and shoes (may still require adult to tie laces)
- Can untie and remove own shoes with laces
- Can independently obtain toothbrush and toothpaste and clean teeth
- Can independently blow nose in self-held tissue
- Can independently bathe with adult set-up (water on and temperature checked, etc)*
- Can independently turn off water for bath with verbal prompt from supervising adult
- Can independently wash hair in bath with set-up (shampoo squirted in hands by adult)
- Can independently hang own bath towel and pick up toys following bath
- Can get personal items independently as needed (clothes, socks, comb, brush, etc.)
- Can independently perform all skills for toileting

- Should independently be able to verbalize need for assistance in bathroom (can't fasten pants, no soap in dispenser, feeling sick to stomach, or change in bowel/bladder movement that needs adult attention)
- Can independently clean self and put clothes in hamper following bowel/bladder accident
- Can wake self at night to use bathroom, but may still need pull-up for deep sleepers
- With adult direction, can independently monitor amount of fluid intake at night to decrease bed-wetting accidents

*If child is showering/bathing unsupervised, an adult must set water temperature on hot water unit to ensure child does not get burned or scalded.

Age 7-10

- Can independently choose clothes to purchase at store
- Can independently select weather-appropriate outfits to wear each day
- Can independently put on and take off all clothing
- Can manipulate all types of fasteners including being able to tie shoe laces
- Can independently shower and bathe, including water on/off and temperature monitoring
- Can independently wash self and hair in shower (soap and shampoo kept at child height)
- Can independently use restroom during the day and at night
- Can independently obtain and use all personal items required for grooming including brush, comb, toothbrush, toothpaste, hair accessories, etc.
- Can independently wash hands and remember to do so following bathroom use, coughing or sneezing, or after being at school or outside
- Can independently keep bathroom stocked with items such as soap in dispensers, shampoo and conditioner in shower, towels on shelves, etc.
- Can prompt adult when these items need to be replaced and can help pick out at store

Age 10+

- Independent in all grooming
- Independent in all toileting
- Independent in all personal hygiene
- Girls should be educated and prepared for menstruation including what to expect, what to do the first time it occurs, and that it is normal (to minimize anxiety)

Five ways to build a child's independence while dressing, toileting, and grooming:

1. Understand the sequence in which a child develops the above skills. If a child does not have the bimanual skills to hold a jacket and zip up the fastener, the child will need to work on a lower processing skill first. Each skill set must be mastered before a child can move to the more advanced set.
2. Provide the child with many (high frequency) opportunities to develop these skills. Let them be as independent as possible during bath time, grooming, dressing, and toileting, but keep SAFETY as top priority. A child must be provided a lot of experiences in each skill set for mastery and progression. However, some of the skills obviously require adult supervision and attention for safety until children are independent.
3. Appropriately model each skill set and allow the child time to perform each task. It is very important that a child sees appropriate behaviors and modeling to learn how to use the toilet, put on and take off clothing, manipulate fasteners, self-clean, and so forth. An adult or older child must provide good modeling for a young child to learn these skills. Also, while engaged in the activities, allow the child time to process the experience and practice the skills. Accidents are going to happen as a child learns to master toilet training, particularly at night. (Mattress protectors beneath a child's bed sheets are recommended during toilet-training skills development.)
4. Provide the child appropriate feedback regarding their performance on the task. Be sure to praise children who attempt new skills and engage in activities that promote independence. Children who receive positive feedback for efforts and accomplishments will be motivated to practice new skills. Try not to focus on toileting accidents, mismatched clothing, or initially poorly cleaned rooms. The most important thing is to encourage effort and independence by a child.
5. Repetition: High frequency is required when developing and mastering any of these skills

Independence and Competence in Typical Household Daily Chores

Listed below are chore sets that are developmentally arranged in groups for typical ages. However, they must be modified to fit a child's sequential processing abilities. Motor skills should also be considered when picking the appropriate chore set for each child. Chore activities in proceeding sets can also be used for older or more mature children.

Age 2

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE: A typical child at this age may be processing at a 2 and will be developing the very important skill of IMITATING. Toddlers usually enjoy imitating things they see adults or siblings do, and this can be used to build foundations for accomplishing chores. Toddlers can participate in the following chore set alongside an adult and learn how to work and complete a task.

- Can independently pick up toys and put in adult-held basket or container
- Can put dirty clothes in hamper with adult verbal prompt and direction
- Can dust flat surface with sock on hand
- Can watch adult model making child's bed and listen as adult verbalizes each step
- Can put favorite blanket or stuffed animal on bed following adult making it
- Can wipe things like chairs, dolls, walls, etc with a washcloth or baby wipe
- Can pick up toys from the bathtub and put them in a bin/basket that parent is holding*
- Can take off pictures on chore chart following each job with adult assistance
- Can complete 1 and 2-step tasks

Helpful hints:

Use these simple steps in appropriately setting up the activity:

1. Get your child's attention. "Johnny, please come here. It is time to do our chores."
2. Give brief demonstration with 2-step verbal instructions. "Use this wipe and wash this wall, please."
3. Give child the wipe and then walk away. Let child do this independently for no more than 2 minutes.
4. Encourage. "You did a great job on your chore. Thank you!"
5. **DO NOT WORRY IF THE JOB IS NOT DONE PERFECTLY! DO NOT FINISH OR REDO!**

*It is typically easier to clean up a bathtub of toys yourself than it is spend the time allowing your 2-year-old to do it. However, remember that your goal isn't to have the cleanest tub, but to teach

your young toddler how to listen and process directions, how to anticipate an end result, and how to engage in an activity that isn't play. It is important that you allow your child to do this without you rushing in to do it for them. Children learn very early that if someone else will do the job, they don't need to exert the effort.

NOTE: Take the time to set up a "job" like washing a chair or wall, encourage your child to do this, and then stand back and let them work on it for no more than 2 minutes. Be sure to praise their work, but don't rush in to finish it! Teach your child that their effort is valuable and it is independent of you.

Age 3

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE: This is when your child's motor skills, including bimanual coordination, finger dexterity, and fine motor manipulation, will really start to emerge. Your child can begin to engage in some basic, independent chores that require no supervision or hands-on help from an adult.

- Can wipe down counters and tables (hard surfaces) with a washcloth
- Can wash windows and mirrors with assistance (may need parent to squirt the window cleaner)
- Can independently put toys in basket or bin next to toy mess
- Can take things in and out of containers (take out for play, put away for chores)
- Can screw on/off lids on containers
- Can spread a blanket over bed
- Can take dirty clothes in hamper to laundry room
- Can carry a small step stool to use when needed
- Can sort items from one container to another
- Can carry things from one room to the next with a two-handle basket
- Can check to see if pet needs food/water
- Can put silverware away (involving matching)

Helpful hints:

Be sure that your child knows exactly what the chore expectation is, and be simple and clear in your directions and explanations. Children do well with simple chore charts with incentives like one where stickers can be applied each time a chore is completed. Always give chores that your child can initiate, work on, and complete independently and then be sure to not go back over their work to perfect it. It is important that your child learns that his work is valuable and that someone won't just redo it later. Any of these chore sets can be modified to fit your lifestyle and household. This is a general guideline when creating a chore list that should include carrying, sorting, matching, opening, closing, filling, emptying, etc. and no more than 2-3 step directions.

Age 4

- Can take own plate and utensils to counter by sink following meal
- Can clean up own messes/spills after eating
- Can vacuum after adult sets up and with supervision
- Can give pet scoop of food
- Can put dirty clothes in hamper
- Can sweep floor using child-sized broom
- Can participate in pulling sheets and blankets while adult supervises making child's bed
- Can independently put pillow, favorite blanket, and stuffed animal on bed after it is made
- Can dust, wipe, and clean surfaces independently
- Can be responsible to keep room somewhat clean and organized
- Can pull weeds with adult direction
- Can participate in gardening and planting seasonal fruits and vegetables
- Can participate in harvesting items from garden

Age 5-6

- Can independently set table with plates, utensils, napkins, and cups
- Can independently clear table following meal
- Can independently vacuum
- Can clean surfaces with soaps and rags
- Can independently make own bed*
- Can take off sheets from bed
- Can independently sort clothes in laundry bins (colors and whites)
- Can fold simple laundered items like hand towels, shirts, etc
- Can take own trash and reline garbage can
- Can put away toys in organized bins or cubbies
- Can sweep and mop floors mop floors
- Can obtain child-safe cleaning supplies from child height shelves (behind doors that younger siblings/babies cannot open to obtain)
- Can shake rugs
- Can unload and sort utensils from dishwasher
- Can be in charge of pets-feeding and letting adult know when water container is low
- Can play with younger siblings (telling stories to, reading simple books to)
- Can independently maintain a small square foot garden with adult direction
- Can pull weeds

*Making one's bed independently is a skill that comes with a lot of practice and opportunity. A child may give full effort and the bed could still look unmade. Top bunks on bunk bed sets may make it difficult for a child to practice this skill and may require the child to make another ground-level bed. Please refer to the five ways one can increase a child's independence in chores below when helping a child master bed-making skills.

Age 7-10

- Can independently take off bed sheets, but may require assistance putting clean ones on
- Can hang clothes independently
- Can use washer/dryer
- Can fold and put clothes and clean laundered items in their respectful places
- Can load/unload dishwasher
- Can put any and all household items away, not just toys
- Can be independently in charge of food and water for pets
- Can get mail, help plan shopping lists, and carry in and put away groceries
- Can sweep inside and outside, and keep walkways clear of light snow (won't be able to shovel a lot of snow if too heavy or frozen)
- Can read to and play with younger siblings and help them accomplish their own chores
- Can independently grow and maintain a square foot garden with no supervision
- Can independently clean toilet with appropriate cleaning products
- Independently washes own clothes and properly puts away
- Independently keeps room and bathroom clean and organized
- Can begin to assume responsibility for broad range of household needs, becoming a contributing member of family beyond simply taking care of their own personal needs and space

Age 10+

- Independent in all appropriate household chores
- Can work towards independence in functional skills like simple car mechanics, gardening and lawn care, snow removal, child care, grocery shopping, house organization, etc.
- Becomes "highly capable"

Five ways to build a child's independence while doing chores:

1. Understand the sequence in which a child develops the above skills. A child must first learn to pick up items and know where they go before they can be required to keep a bedroom clean and organized.
2. Reverse Chaining: It is often easier to teach a new multi-step task through the use of reverse chaining. Reverse chaining refers to teaching a new skill by teaching the child the last step to complete a task, followed by the next to last, and so on. Having the child complete the task is much more reinforcing than just doing the first step. For example the last step in making a child's bed might be putting the pillows in place. You would show the child all of the steps and then have the child complete the bed making by placing the pillows on the bed. Following that success, then have them finish pulling up the bedspread and then put on the pillows, etc.
3. Provide the child with a high frequency of opportunities to develop these skills. Let him be as independent as possible while engaged in chores. A child must be provided a lot of experiences in each skill set for mastery and progression.
4. Appropriately model each skill set and allow the child time to perform each task. It is very important that a child sees appropriate behaviors and modeling to learn how to clean, organize, wash, make beds, etc.
5. Provide the child appropriate feedback regarding their performance on the task. Be sure to praise children who attempt new skills and engage in activities that promote independence. Children who receive positive feedback for efforts and accomplishments will be motivated to practice new skills. Disregard beds that are independently made by a child under seven but still look wrinkled and imperfect. To teach a child the value of their efforts and responsibility in chore completion, that child's work needs to be adequate at every skill stage. Going behind a child to redo a chore teaches them that ultimately the responsibility falls on an adult, not the child. It also teaches the child that one cannot depend on them, which is counterproductive to self-reliance and independence. However, the goal is to teach competence, independence, and responsibility.
6. Repetition: High frequency is required when developing and mastering any skill, especially learning how to complete chores correctly, anticipate daily responsibilities, and accomplishing new tasks.