

# Having Your Child Complete Independent Activities

As many schools have closed, parents are looking for things to do enhance their child's learning. One area that is often a struggle is completing daily living activities or engaging for a sustained period. Many parents are challenged with trying to keep their child occupied while juggling working from home and running a household. This becomes more manageable if the child is able to engage independently in everyday activities, work tasks, or leisure activities. Below some tips on how to get your child to engage in a task/activity independently.

Remember the guidelines from Including Your Child in Daily Activities and Chores:

- **Start with things your child enjoys doing.**
- **Consider the things your child can already do.**
- **Start with only one or two chores.**
- **Start with activities and chores that are brief.**
- **Plan for reinforcement.**
- **Plan for when you will do the activity.**

## **Guidelines for Getting the Child to Become Independent for Daily Living Skills or Other Skills:**

- **Set them up for success!** It is best to help your child get the new steps right in the beginning instead of letting them make mistakes.
- For most children who are not able to engage in self-care or daily living skills, the task may need to be broken down into steps.
  - Figure out what steps your child can already do independently
  - Make a plan for the needed steps.
    - For many children, it is helpful that the first few times you do the task; you narrate the steps while helping/prompting in whichever way necessary. As soon as possible, fade out any verbal prompting and follow prompt guidelines below
    - Sometimes you can work on the whole task at once, especially if your child can already do many of the steps.
      - Allow your child to do what they can independently.
      - Help (prompt) your child with steps they cannot do on their own. For independent skills, it is best to use gestural (providing a point or some signal to guide them), modeling (show them what to do so they can imitate you), or physical prompts as opposed to any verbal prompts.
      - Fade your help (prompt) as soon as possible
      - When using physical prompts, you can do so by standing behind your child like a shadow and guiding them through the new step(s). As your child becomes more independent, you can step back and let them do it independently.
      - If your child makes a mistake, just back up to the last correct step and try again, but this time, help with the step they missed (do not allow the mistake to happen again).
    - If the task is new and difficult, then you may work on one step at a time and keep adding steps as they learn them. This can be done one of two ways:

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- **Starting with the last step (backward chaining):**
  - o Help your child through all of the initial steps and then work with him or her on the last step first.
  - o Once your child can do the last step independently, start working on the second to last step and allow your child to complete the last step independently.
  - o You will continue to work backwards on each step until the entire task is completed independently.
- **Starting with the first step (forward chaining):**
  - o Begin with the first step, and then help your child through the rest of the steps.
  - o Once the first step is learned, your child should do the first step independently and start working on the second step.
  - o For each step you work on, let the child complete the ones they can do on their own and help them through the rest until they can do the whole thing independently.
- As your child becomes more independent, work on telling your child to complete a task and then moving away or even leaving the room. Once you are at this point, you can also work with your child getting your attention to tell you when the task is finished.
- o **For other activities:**
  - Choose tasks that you know your child can do and that have a definite end.
  - These might include puzzles, matching activities, worksheets, assembly tasks, easy crafts where they can independently copy a model, matching and folding socks, rolling silverware etc.
  - Choose somewhere to set up the tasks and some type of order to set them up in. Some examples include “To Do” and “Done” baskets on a table or countertop, or a three-drawer cart with a task in each drawer. Whatever works for you as long as it can be consistent!
  - As with other tasks, figure out what steps your child can do independently.
  - Task will begin with your direction to do the work, which should lead to your child going to the table/counter/cart and beginning the first activity.
  - The task ends when your child has completed all of the activities, puts them in the designated “done” area, and gets your attention to tell you that all of the tasks are finished.
- Celebrate! Throw the best parties for new skills and new levels of independence.
- For some children, once they can complete a few activities, you can start setting up an activity schedule that they can follow on their own. To learn how to set up an activity schedule check out the guidelines on [Setting Up Activity Schedules](#)