

Showing the way: hand-over-hand guidance helps children to learn skills, and is phased out as they learn to do it by themselves



Independence ways

We hear it time and time again: mastering daily living skills is the key to achieving independence. Risca Solomon takes us through techniques that parents can apply to everyday tasks at home



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Daily living skills can include many tasks, such as taking a shower, getting dressed, making food, toilet training, cleaning your teeth and, for girls, managing menstruation.

These can be difficult skills for some individuals with autism to learn; however, teaching them is vital. As they grow up, our children's ability to be as independent as possible by

managing their daily living skills can enable them to gain greater access to regular community facilities and activities.

The teaching of daily living skills should be started early, as it can take a long time for some individuals to learn each one. Teaching is also limited by the small number of learning opportunities per day for some of the skills.

Task analysis

Each skill is made up of a number of individual behaviours, so the first step in teaching is to break down a skill into its component behaviours; this is called a task analysis. Here is an example of a task analysis for washing hands:

- Stand in front of sink
- Squeeze soap onto hand
- Rub hands together
- Turn tap on
- Rub hands under running water
- Turn tap off
- Locate towel
- Rub hands in towel until dry

This task analysis requires a variety of motor skills. It also requires the child to be able to turn a tap, to have adequate pressure to press down a soap dispenser, to rub their hands together and so on. If your child, like many on the autism spectrum, has motor skills >>

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deficits you will need to take these into account. An occupational therapist could help you to address such issues.

The most common technique to teach the chains of behaviour that make up a self-help skill is called backward chaining. This is when you begin by teaching the child to complete the last step independently, while for all the steps before that you help the child using hand-over-hand guidance.

You would decrease your prompting by gradually fading out your hand-over-hand assistance on the last step until the child can complete the skill independently. Once the child can complete the last behaviour independently, you begin targeting the second-to-last behaviour to fade your prompts, then getting the child to follow it by completing the last behaviour independently.

Carry on in this manner to work your way backwards through all of the behaviours.

It's important to use reinforcement in teaching self-help skills. Reinforcement is a consequence that you would initiate after a



Some of the self-help modules offered in the *Assessment of Functional Living Skills*

Important self-help skills to master		
Curriculum Area	Key Activities	
Planning and preparing meals	Planning a menu	Preparing meals
	Using cooking equipment	Storing food safely
Self care, bathing and hygiene	Showering or bathing	Caring for hair
	Caring for nails	Caring for teeth
	Toileting	Washing hands and face
Cleaning and care of the home	Vacuuuming	Dusting and wiping surfaces
	Neatening and organizing	
Cleaning and care of clothing	Washing and drying clothes	Changing clothes as needed
	Folding and storing clothes	
Telephone use	Calling for appointments or services	Calling in emergencies
	Calling friends and acquaintances	Answering calls from others
Leisure activities	Watching television	Performing hobbies
	Listening to music	Entertaining visitors
Safety procedures	Calling emergency services	Evacuating during a fire
	Responding to smoke detectors	Using a fire extinguisher
	Calling an ambulance or doctor if someone becomes very sick	Safely answering the door
Time management and scheduling activities	Adhering to a daily schedule	Following a calendar
	Using alarm clocks	
Negotiating with others and self-advocacy	Negotiating responsibilities with roommates	Negotiating communal versus private property and areas within the home
	Negotiating with neighbors regarding issues such as noise, external lights, and so on	Speaking up to ensure that important responsibilities are carried out by roommates or others
	Speaking up on one's behalf to ensure that needed supports are obtained	

Source: Autism Speaks

behaviour with the aim of encouraging the behaviour to increase in the future. Things that act as a reinforcement are individual to each child, so you will need to find effective reinforcers that can be delivered at the end of each chain to encourage the child to learn the self-help skill.

There has been a surge in curricula to address living skills for individuals with autism and related conditions. The most comprehensive is the *Assessment of Functional Living Skills* by Partington Behavior Analysts. It contains assessments for home skills, basic living skills, school skills, community participation, vocational skills and independent living skills.

As a good source of advice on self-help skills, we recommend the book *Self-Help Skills for People with Autism: A Systematic Teaching Approach* by Stephen Anderson and Amy Jablonski.

Further reading



Taking Care of Myself: A Hygiene, Puberty and Personal Curriculum for Young People, by Mary Wrobel, Future Horizons, \$24.95/available in the UK from Eurospan Bookstore, £25.50



The Child with Autism at Home and in the Community: Over 600 Must-have Tips for Making Home Life and Outings Easier for Everyone! by Kathy Labosh and LaNita Miller, Future Horizons, \$9.95/available in the UK from Eurospan Bookstore, £10.50



Self-Help Skills for People with Autism: A Systematic Teaching Approach by Stephen Anderson and Amy Jablonski, Woodbine House Inc, available from online retailers at a range of prices

CONTACTS

- Partington Behavior Analysts: www.partingtonbehavioranalysts.com/page/afis-74.html
- Woodbine House: www.woodbinehouse.com