

Increasing independence in autistic children

What are daily living skills?

Daily living skills are tasks that children and adults do every day such as eating, drinking, bathing or showering, dressing etc. Many children are self-motivated to be independent with these activities and they often learn by imitating adults or older siblings. However, children with autism or developmental delays often struggle with imitation skills, attention or communication skills and may require additional support.

Why is being independent an important skill for my child to develop?

Being independent with daily living skills and being able to do things by yourself gives you a feeling of confidence and increases your self-esteem which in return will help to make you feel happy and proud. Of course, it also means more time for you as the parent if you don't have to do the tasks for your child.

Top tips for developing independence with daily living skills:

Use visual schedules – Using pictures or words to break down tasks can be a visual reminder as to what comes next. For example, dressing may involve: put on underwear, put on shirt, put on shorts, put on socks, put on shoes.



Reward Schedule – Give lots of verbal praise every time your child attempts to do something by themselves. Be specific with your praise e.g. "I liked how you put toothpaste on your toothbrush".



Using social stories – Social stories can be helpful to provide more opportunities to read and talk about a particular task and to explain what is expected of a child.



Fading prompts – Initially your child may require verbal prompts to follow certain steps. As your child improves with his independence skills be mindful to reduce verbal prompts over time to avoid your child becoming dependent on verbal prompts.

Making tasks short and predictable – Not knowing how long a task will last can be very stressful for a child with sensory sensitivities. Give the task a definite beginning and end e.g., counting from 1 to 10 or singing a liked song.



Generalisation of skill – When working on a specific skill ensure that you use the same strategies at home, at school and in the community. For example, when you are using a visual schedule for handwashing, use the same schedule across all environments.



If you have any further concerns about increasing independence in your child, please discuss with a member of your clinical team, a health professional or CliniKids on (08) 6319 1133.

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