



OT Tips for Self-Help Skills

Young children like to feel independent, but sometimes they need encouragement to feel that they are capable and that adults believe that they “can” do it. Teaching independence with self-help skills like hand washing, brushing teeth, and dressing/undressing is an important step in development.



- Break down the routine into simple steps and state each step one at a time. Say, “All done washing, now it’s time to turn off the water.”
- Show your child how to do each step. Be prepared to provide your child with reminders about what to do.
- Say, “First wash hands, and then we can eat snack”; or “First brush your teeth, and then I can give you a minty fresh kiss”; or “First get dressed, and then you can choose milk or juice.”
- Let your child make choices. With brushing teeth, you could say, “Do you want to use the mint toothpaste or the bubble gum toothpaste?”
- Help your child be successful by encouraging all attempts when a child is first learning. If they become frustrated, say, “I know it’s hard to brush your teeth. Let me help.”
- Remember that young children need a lot of practice—and your support—before they are able to do new skills independently.
- Encourage your child as each routine is completed and celebrate when the task is done!

Adapted from: The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning Vanderbilt University vanderbilt.edu/csefel