



NHSA Family Connections

October 2011

What are Self-help Skills?

Self help skills are everyday activities which young children do for themselves. These include activities such as eating and feeding, dressing, grooming, and helping with simple chores. Child development experts refer to these self-help skills as “adaptive behaviors.” These are age-appropriate skills and personal care habits that a child uses to be safe and take responsibility for him or herself.

How do children learn to take responsibility for themselves? They learn self-help skills over many years one step at a time, one day at a time. Infants and toddlers watch parents take care of themselves and others.

- They first watch us dressing, eating, and grooming.
- They watch us take care of our homes, hold jobs and follow rules.
- Toddlers imitate everything we do, even though they still need our help to finish most personal care tasks.



Head Start programs know that that young children need self-help skills for school readiness. Many non-academic skills are needed to be a successful student and good personal care habits are needed for a healthy life. Head Start children grow quickly and we can expect them to do many things for themselves.

- They need us to break new tasks into small steps while they practice.
- Do not expect perfection and use patient encouragement to teach them.
- They need the chance to practice everyday and can become quite independent!

Our job is to know what skills are reasonable to expect children to be able to do to care for their own body. Then we must give them the time and chance to learn to do them. But we must also remember that each child is unique! Each will learn the following self-help skills on his or her own timeline.

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	Eating & Feeding	Dressing	Grooming	Daily Chores
Baby 6+ months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ (8-9 mos.) eat solid foods ▪ Hold own bottle ▪ Pick up spoon and move it to mouth ▪ Eat finger food ▪ Feed self crackers ▪ Drink from a 'sippy' cup held by adult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extend an arm or leg when being dressed ▪ Put hat on top of head 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Play in water ▪ Show awareness of self in mirror 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reach for objects ▪ Find partially hidden objects ▪ Drop toys into container
Toddler 1 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ask for food and drink ▪ Pick up small pieces of cereal to eat ▪ Hold cup and drinks with some spills ▪ Hold a spoon and scoops food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learn to take off hat, socks, and shoes without laces ▪ Learn to unzip large zippers ▪ Put on large loose clothing (hat, gloves, slippers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Imitate adults & practice skills ▪ Wash a doll and easy to reach body parts ▪ Help test water temperature with one finger ▪ Place hands in running water and rub 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Watch & imitate adult chores ▪ Squat to pick up a toy ▪ Join simple toy pick-up games
Toddler 2 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drink from a small cup, holding it with one hand ▪ Bite well through food ▪ Bring spoon to mouth with the palm facing up ▪ Eat a meal with a spoon, sometimes a fork- minimal spilling ▪ Usually chew with mouth closed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can pull pants down ▪ Slip feet into shoes, pull loose socks up ▪ Put arms & head into shirt opening, arms into jacket sleeves ▪ Unbutton a large button ▪ Undress and dress with help to pull shirt over head, pull pants up over bottom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Practice blowing nose and using a tissue ▪ Help shampoo hair ▪ Practice spitting out toothpaste ▪ Helps dry off ▪ Looks in mirror and helps brush hair ▪ Some anticipate the need to use the toilet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Put toys away ▪ Help feed pets ▪ Put clothes in hamper ▪ Help clean spills with adult ▪ Help dust with socks on hands ▪ Stack books
Child 3 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eat independently ▪ Pour from a small cup ▪ Begin to use a fork to spear food ▪ Can spread with a dull butter knife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undo fasteners, (snaps and laces) ▪ Knows front from back of clothes ▪ Button two large buttons ▪ Put on socks, may need help with heel placement ▪ Zip and unzip jackets but needs help with starting ▪ Put shoes on, may have trouble telling which feet ▪ Still needs adult help with dressing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wash hands before eating, and after bathroom use and playing outside ▪ Use a toothbrush and combs hair with help ▪ Use toilet with adult help ▪ Usually has daytime toilet control ▪ Cover mouth when sneezing or coughing ▪ Spit out toothpaste ▪ Use a tissue to wipe a runny nose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Put most things away without help ▪ Help prepare simple food with adult supervision ▪ Help carry bags and put away groceries ▪ Help collect dirty laundry ▪ Keep track of favorite blanket or toy ▪ Help fix a toy or torn book ▪ Climb in a car seat, help buckle ▪ Put own garbage in trash can ▪ Help set table
Child 4 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poke food with a fork ▪ Use fork more than spoon ▪ Hold spoon in fingers with proper grip ▪ Learn to cut soft foods with the edge of fork ▪ Learn to make a bowl of dry cereal with milk ▪ Use napkin ▪ Serve self at table, few spills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Put on socks, adjust heel ▪ Put on shoes -some help ▪ Button three shirt buttons ▪ Unbuckle shoes and belts ▪ Put shirts on correctly ▪ Put belt in loops ▪ Lace up top 2 holes in shoe ▪ Pull off a large t-shirt ▪ Some can put shoes on correct feet and knot laces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use toilet independently ▪ Squeeze toothpaste with help ▪ Brush teeth, spit out toothpaste and rinse with water ▪ Wash and dry face and hands ▪ Wash self in tub, dry off ▪ Brush hair with little help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clear & set table, little help ▪ Load backpack ▪ Turn off TV ▪ Put on pajamas, lay out clothes for morning ▪ Make simple cold meals ▪ Help put clean dishes away ▪ Help water plants ▪ Wipe up simple messes ▪ Help fold & put away laundry

Team Up for Family-Teacher Conferences

All Head Start and Early Head Start Programs must meet regularly with families to share each child's learning goals and development (Head Start Performance Standard 1304.40 Family partnerships). This is a time for all caregiving adults—including parents, grandparents, guardians and teachers—to celebrate what your child knows and can do!

Your child's teacher has been watching your child grow over the past several weeks and has many exciting things to share with you about his or her progress and abilities.

You know this child better than anyone because you live together and care deeply about his or her future. Together you make a great team! The number one rule: never miss a family-teacher conference.

During the conference you will hear about your child's interests and information from the developmental screenings that took place in the beginning of the program year.



Don't be nervous about meeting with your child's teacher, he or she is a friend who also wants to see your child grow and learn. If you are anxious—tell the teacher, he or she will help you feel more relaxed. Our program cares about both you and your child!



“My goal is for Frieda to love to read! How can I teach her to read?”

The short answer: Read to her! Learning to read requires young children to be mature enough to focus on small text and to understand how each letter works with others to make each word—that's much more than knowing the names of the letters!

Few three and four year old children are ready to read for themselves BUT every child learns to love reading by being read to! Visit the library often and make reading a habit.

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Suggestions for Your Family-Teacher Conference and Home Visits:



- Write down two questions you want to ask your child's teacher or the Home Visitor. Write down one goal.
- Arrive on time or be ready for the family service visitor to arrive on time.
- Turn off your cell phone ringer and turn off your TV if you have a family service visitor.
- Ask the teacher or family service visitor to explain any words or information you don't fully understand.
- Share things about your child's habits, health, interests, temperament and daily life at home.
- Listen with an open mind and stay calm if you hear something you did not expect.
- Ask what you can do at home to help your child meet the goal you have and the goals that the teacher or family service visitor has.
- Remember that many goals take longer than one day or month to learn.
- Ask the teacher to help you understand the smaller steps you can do to help your child toward these bigger goals.
- At the end of the visit, be sure to smile and shake hands with the teacher.
- Do not discuss your child's conference with anyone in front of your child. Young children hear and remember everything!
- Share a positive thing the teacher shared and one goal you'll work on at home.
- If you have more questions that you think of after the meeting, call the teacher or family service visitor. They'll be happy to help.