

I Can Do It

At this age, nothing makes your child feel more independent than accomplishing everyday tasks all by herself. And children who are self-reliant at home are more independent in school.

The following activities will help put your little one on the path to self-sufficiency. Suggest that she check off each skill as her "I can do it!" list grows.



Skill: Put away toys

Activity: Build "homes" for toys

Motivate your youngster to organize her room and keep it neat by making houses for her toys. Let her collect cardboard boxes and use crayons to draw windows and doors. Next, have her choose toys to "live" in each house. For example, she might decide a small appliance box makes a good "garage" for parking her miniature cars and that an oatmeal-can "tower" could store her blocks. Help her label each house with the name of the toys that live there. *Example:* "Tori's Car Garage." When playtime is over, she'll be excited to send her toys home by putting them away in their houses.

Skill: Fix a snack

Activity: Make a menu

Together, create a menu of snacks your child can prepare on his own. Ask him to flip through grocery circulars or magazines and cut out pictures of snack ingredients. Encourage him to choose combinations that he can put together himself, like yogurt and berries, cheese and crackers, and cereal with milk



and a banana. Then, have him fold a large piece of construction paper in half, open it up, and glue on his pictures to make a menu. At snack time, he can look at his menu and choose a snack to make. *Idea:* Order from his menu, and let him prepare the snack for you.

Fostering independence

It's tempting to leap to the rescue when your youngster is learning a new skill. But he will gain more confidence if you offer to be his helper instead of the "doer." Try these tips.

- **Be patient.** Give your child time to work at his own pace, even if that pace seems to be s-l-o-w motion. If you're on a tight schedule in the morning, consider setting your alarm a few minutes early to build in extra time for him to get dressed.



- **Encourage persistence.** Does your youngster give up before he completes a task? Be a cheerleader to motivate him to persevere. ("Look at how much you've already done!") Or offer to assist with part of the job. ("You tie the left shoe, and I'll tie the right.")

- **Recognize frustration.** If your child is reaching his limit, gently suggest that he take a break. You might say something like "You worked hard and did a lot on your own. Let's try again later."

continued



Skill: Clean up messes

Activity: Make a child-sized cleanup kit

Oops! Your youngster got muddy footprints all over the kitchen floor. Rather than cleaning up his messes, teach him to handle them himself by creating a supply box together. Have him write his name and “My cleanup kit” in permanent marker on a bucket. Then, help him fill the kit with kid-friendly cleaning supplies like a spray bottle of water, rags, paper towels, sponges, and cleaning wipes. Store the kit within easy reach. When he makes a mess, he can grab his kit and clean it up!

Skill: Pick out clothes

Activity: Hold a fashion show

Make picking out clothes easy for your child by helping her assemble outfits ahead of time. Go through her closet together, and have her choose combinations of tops and bottoms. Have her include shoes, socks, belts, and hair accessories that complete her outfits. Then, let her model the ensembles for you. Take a photo of her wearing each one, or she could draw pictures of herself wearing them. Afterward, put the pictures into a “catalog” (a photo album). Each night before bed, she can browse through the pictures, select an outfit to wear the next day, and lay it out herself.

Skill: Make the bed

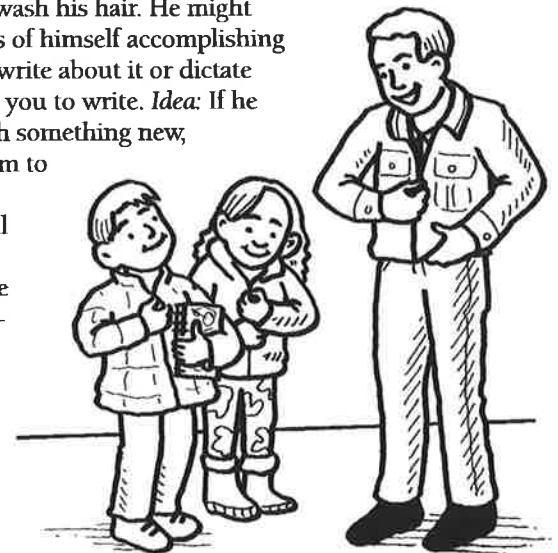
Activity: Sing a song

Singing a playful tune gives your youngster a simple way to remember how to do a job like making her bed. Let her pick a familiar song, and help her change the words to match the steps. For instance, instead of “Row, row, row your boat,” she could sing, “Smooth, smooth, smooth the sheets.” She’ll enjoy making up a new verse for each step and singing her song as she works. *Tip:* Resist the urge to fix things for her when she’s done—if you redo her work, you send the message that her efforts weren’t good enough. Instead, show your pride: “Wow! You made your bed all by yourself!”

Skill: Take care of yourself

Activity: Keep an “I did it!” diary

Celebrate your child’s personal-care accomplishments by letting him record them in a diary. Let him write “I did it!” on the front of a notebook and personalize the cover with a drawing. He can add entries as he learns to zip his coat, floss his teeth, or wash his hair. He might draw pictures of himself accomplishing the task and write about it or dictate sentences for you to write. *Idea:* If he struggles with something new, encourage him to look at his diary—it will provide an instant source of encouragement. Plus, it will be a great keepsake of his milestones.



Overcoming “I can’t”

Q: I know my daughter is capable of doing many things for herself, but often when I ask her to try, she insists that she can’t. What should I do?

A: When you encourage your daughter to try something new, start by letting her know you believe she’s capable of doing it. Often, simply saying something like “I’ve got a big-kid job that’s perfect for you” is enough to make her strive to meet your expectations.



If your child struggles, try demonstrating how to do each step and asking her to repeat your actions. Continue through each step until she feels confident.

Remember that while she is learning, it is best to focus on and praise her attempts. Children who feel that their efforts are recognized are more likely to keep trying.

Early Years