

# SELF-HELP SKILLS

Self-help skills including dressing, drinking, feeding, toileting and washing all require motor skills. Children develop independence at different rates. Some children, due to the nature of their impairment, may take longer to achieve self-help skills, e.g. using hands and fingers for feeding or collecting items. The child may need adaptations to equipment, e.g. enlarging cutlery using a plastic tube over the shaft.

Fine motor skills form a building block to independence and are essential for young children to consolidate skills and so provide opportunities for success in other areas of development. Children with physical disabilities or motor difficulties sometimes experience problems acquiring self-help skills.



Children experiencing difficulties with fine motor skills may be on the caseload of an Occupational Therapist who could recommend adaptations, e.g. specialist cutlery.

## SUPPORT FOR SELF HELP SKILLS

Achievements - note success, e.g. "I can open the velcro on my shoe."

Dolls - provide an opportunity to practice self-help skills, e.g. dressing a doll.

Hand-on-hand - support will help children to gain confidence, e.g. using cutlery.

Independence - should be encouraged, e.g. taking off / putting on a coat.

Language - instructions should be phrased simply and clearly.

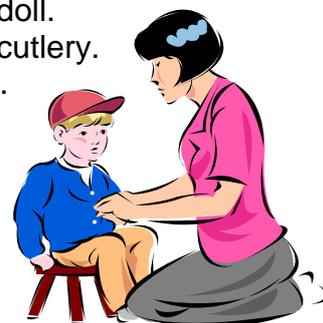
Non-slip mats - e.g. dycem, placed under a bowl, cup or plate.

Routines - involve the child in everyday activities, e.g. washing hands.

Support - encourage the child to attempt a task before intervening.

Tasks - using the child to 'finish off' a task, e.g. place a sock over the foot and heel, then ask the child pull the sock up their leg.

Workspaces - need to offer easy access and space to aid mobility.



## TOP TIPS FOR SELF HELP SKILLS

### Dressing

Fastenings - e.g. buttons, studs, zips skills can be practiced using dressing boards.

Home play dressing babies / dolls - will help develop fine motor skills.

Jumpers, T shirts - when taking off, try supporting by raising it towards the head then asking the child to pull it over their head and take it off.

Layer clothing - stack clothing layer by layer, underwear on top.

Neck - polo shirts have a wider head space than a jumper.

Shirts - one size larger is easier to put on, the buttons are easier to fasten.

Shorts - and T-shirts that are baggy are easier to put on or take off.

Trousers with an elasticated waist - save fiddling with buttons and zips.



Trousers pleated at the front - with a label at the back, make it easier to find 'the right way round'.

Zip - is easier to use when it is connected to a larger item, e.g. key ring, as the child can put their fingers in the ring and pull.

## Drinking

Children can sometimes find difficulties co-ordinating the muscles in their mouth - this can affect the ability to swallow fluids.

Lidded beaker - or an open beaker with a straw is easier to use when it is only one-third full of fluid.

Straw - use a flexible straw with a drink to prevent spilling.



## Feeding

Children can sometimes find difficulties co-ordinating their hands and fingers.

Fork and spoon - may need to be used until the child has developed the skills to use a knife and eat skilfully.

Non-slip mat - e.g. Dycem or a damp tea towel underneath a plate can fix it and keep it still.

Play clay or playdoh can be used to develop skills, e.g. using a plastic knife for cutting.

Spreading butter or jam - to make a sandwich helps develop hand strength.

Spoons - can be used in many play activities, e.g. scooping beads, buttons, etc to practice loading and tipping out.

Plastic cutlery - is blunt, useful when practising using a knife.

Sitting down to eat - where possible, aids digestion and posture.



## Toileting

Children with physical disabilities can sometimes find difficulties completing toilet training and may require nappies when they are in the setting. It would be helpful to refer to your Personal Care Needs Policy, see also '*Children with Personal Care Needs*'.



## Washing

Children may require support to co-ordinate their arms and hands when washing, e.g. operating the tap, using soap and water.

Hand-on-hand - will help the child to follow the routines.

Separate wash area - a bowl on a chair may offer easier access.

Taps - with a lever arm are easier than push or turn taps.

Wash basin - if it is too high, it may be necessary to provide a step.

