

Recognizing that this would be my last article for this school year, I decided to choose a topic that would talk about things you might do with your child over the summer. Since the media does a good job of providing the fun ideas, I decided to tackle the less exciting (yet extremely beneficial) area of skill development.

Helping our children become independent is a challenging yet necessary task. Learning how to look after our own basic needs helps us feel self sufficient and capable. Being able to take on new responsibilities builds our self-esteem and confidence. Feeling like we can handle most things that come our way is both empowering and stress reducing. So how do we build this in our kids?

Some kids are born with a really strong desire for independence and will push for it right from the start (me do it!). The interesting thing is, even these children will often pick and choose what they want to do and quite happily let you continue to do all the pieces they don't want to do for themselves. If you think about it, most of us would love to have someone else do the chores we find monotonous or time consuming (i.e. plan and make supper, dishes, fold laundry, cut the grass...). It's not that we can't do it, it's just that given a choice we might choose not to.

The younger we start to teach kids independence the easier they will accept it. Don't get me wrong, some kids will resist right from the start when you try to encourage them to dress themselves, but these same kids will fight you on it a couple years later as well. So it's worth it to come up with a plan for what you're going to teach, how you're going to teach it and how you will reinforce what you've set up in the first place.

It will almost always be easier to do for your child especially in areas where you want the control... eventually you have to hand it over!

The first step to teaching independence is to determine *What is reasonable given the age and maturity level of my child?*. Don't let this answer stop you from teaching, just use it to ensure you provide the guidance, supervision and encouragement necessary to make this a positive and safe experience. Next, choose one topic to teach and break it down into simple steps (don't assume they know just because they've watched you a million times). One of the *Triple P* strategies for teaching self care skills is to use ASK, SAY, DO.

Ask:	"What's the first thing we do when we wash our hair?"
Say:	"That's right," or "Actually we have to wet our hair first"
Do:	"Let's see you do that"
Praise	"Excellent job, the back of your hair is nice and wet... would you like some help getting the front wet too?"
Repeat	"Okay, what do you think the next step would be?"

The idea behind this process is that the parent provides the child with support and correction only as needed. If the child is getting frustrated, help them complete the task and save the teaching for next time OR (if this is a common occurrence) let them know you would like to help and will be ready to do so as soon as they are calm enough to resume (i.e. washing dishes: "I can see you're getting frustrated, how about giving me a call when you're calm enough to continue... it does need to be done before you go outside.")

The summer is often an ideal time to teach our kids many of the skills they will need to be truly independent. By starting small and keeping at it, we are building confidence, competence and capability in our children.

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