

Toddler Independence



Being at home with a busy toddler can be tiring and at times frustrating for parents. You may find yourself dressing, feeding and tidying up after your toddler because it is quicker and less messy than getting them to help.

Instead of spending energy trying to keep them occupied and out of the way, try to include them in daily family activities.

Children do not see any difference between play and work. They just enjoy being with you. Even if their help is not that useful and it may take you longer to do these things, it is time you can spend together and a chance to develop your toddler's skills.

Remember children develop at their own rate. What they can do will depend on their level of development. It will also depend on the opportunities you provide and the importance you place on them becoming independent.

Here's an idea of what you should expect.

1 - 2 years

- ▷ Scoops food with a spoon (may still spill some)
- ▷ Uses 2 hands to lift a cup (may drop)
- ▷ Lifts foot for shoes and pants
- ▷ Removes socks (whenever they feel like it)
- ▷ Pushes off soiled pants
- ▷ Rubs hands together to clean
- ▷ Opens mouth for teeth to be brushed
- ▷ Allows nose to be wiped, attempts to blow
- ▷ Follows adult around copying home chores

Tip: Plan for mess and accidents by covering floors when encouraging self-feeding. All learners make mistakes.

Let them play with real kitchen objects such as plastic containers and wooden spoons while you cook.

2 - 3 years

- ▷ Holds cup with one hand
- ▷ Uses spoon well with little spilling
- ▷ Spears food with a fork
- ▷ Pours from a small jug
- ▷ Takes off elastic topped pants
- ▷ Pulls off T-shirt
- ▷ Turns taps on and off
- ▷ Brushes hair but needs help with knots and styling
- ▷ Prolonged make-believe play (putting dolls to bed, washing clothes, driving cars)

Tip: Provide a small jug of water so children can pour their own drinks.

Make instructions simple and positive. For example, "pick up the cars" rather than "don't leave that mess."

Large boxes make great stoves or cars - you can draw on hot plates, windows and wheels with a marker.

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3 – 4 years

- ▷ Holds spoon with fingers
- ▷ Can get a drink from the tap
- ▷ Can wipe up spills
- ▷ Puts socks on with help
- ▷ Puts on shoes, but not fussy about which foot
- ▷ Puts on T-shirt and pants (may be inside out or backwards)
- ▷ Wipes nose
- ▷ Washes body
- ▷ Manages clothes before and after toilet
- ▷ Likes to help with adult activities in the house and garden
- ▷ Loves dramatic play such as dressing up and construction with anything available

Tip: Encourage them by noticing what they feel is a success. For example, “You got your shirt on!”

Have a ‘busy box’ with recyclable materials such as boxes, bottle tops, paper that they can use for imaginative play or artworks.

Give them a cloth to help wipe or a small broom or rake to encourage them to be actively involved in household chores.

4 – 5 years

- ▷ Starting to use knife for spreading
- ▷ Holds fork well in fingers
- ▷ Starting to eat liquids with a spoon
- ▷ Puts shoes mostly on correct feet
- ▷ Buckles shoe or belt
- ▷ Manages velcro shoes
- ▷ Brushes teeth, but not thoroughly
- ▷ Manages toileting, wiping (may need checking)
- ▷ Progressing with blowing and wiping nose

Tip: Do not rush to help them too quickly - encourage them by having confidence in their ability. “You’ll make it.”

There are of course times when children need help if they are getting distressed or the task is just too hard.

Encourage them to ask for help when they need it. “You are trying hard, can I help?”

If you know clothes are tight or difficult to get on, it is better to help them with the hard bits such as getting their sock over their toe, or heel, so they can finish the job successfully.

Make sure they can concentrate on the task by turning off the television.

Give them choices. “Do you want to wear the blue or the green T-shirt?”

Give them small jobs like putting their dishes in the dishwasher.