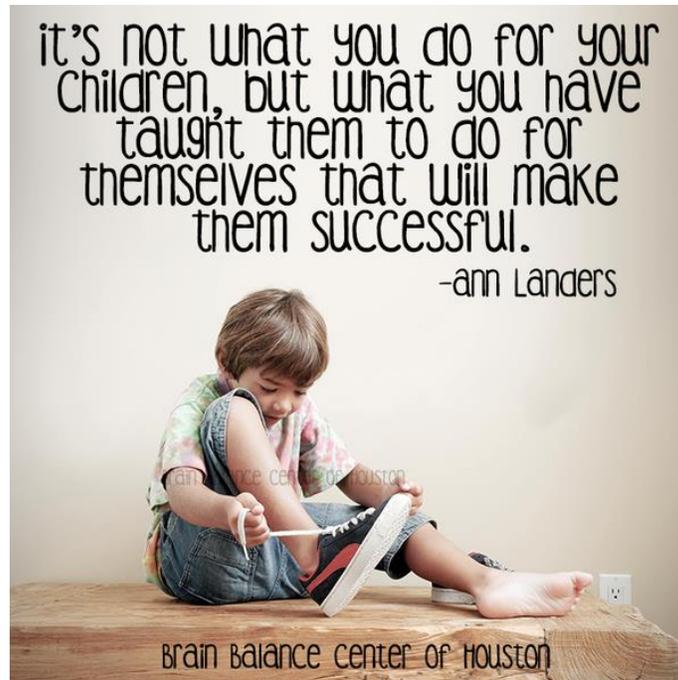


Promoting Independence at Home



The current restrictions on work and school mean huge changes to our day to day lives. While this can be challenging it also brings opportunity to develop skills that can sometimes fall by the wayside in the hustle and bustle of regular life. Without the external stresses of school and other commitments, now may be a good opportunity to introduce and allow the time to practice your child's independence skills at home.

Balancing the instinct to protect your child while allowing them to develop and grow is a very common challenge for parents. There can also be concerns about how communication, mobility or learning difficulties may impact your child's independence. Sometimes, families just get into the habit of doing things for children that they could do themselves because life is busy and it's quicker. However, one of your most important jobs as a parent is not just to care and provide for your child's needs but also to teach them the skills that will allow them to maximise their independence as they grow. Feeling able to do things for

themselves (even small things) is one of the ways children learn to feel capable and good about themselves. This confidence helps establish a sense of self-worth and self-reliance that sets the foundation for developing skills throughout their lives.

We hope the resources below will help you to start thinking about how you can support your child's independence at home.

Ages and Stages

The types of skills you can help your children to develop depend on their stage of development. Some children's stage of development may be younger than their chronological age. Tune in to your child's stage and needs and adapt what you're working on to suit your child.

Early Stages (0 - 5 years)

- Infants are dependent on their parent/carer for all care needs, they develop attachment to their main carer(s) by 9 months and can learn some coping skills and independence - learn to self-soothe, fall asleep on his/her own.
- Toddlers are growing in independence, using their main carer as a 'safe base'. Toddlers can imitate and mimic others, will ask for food and demand attention. At this age, children begin to make choices and start to want to do things for themselves.
- By pre-school age, children will be developing the ability to share and take turns. Children will start learning to feel secure away from their main carers and will be beginning to play with other children and make friends. At this stage, children benefit from opportunities to display independence- picking out own clothes, potty training.

School Stage (5 - 10 years)

- Children begin to cope with and enjoy brief separations from home and carers with adult supervision e.g. school.
- They begin to make and develop friendships.
- They can start to take some responsibility with chores e.g. set the table/remember to feed the fish.
- They begin learning who they are as individuals and have a growing sense of their own identity. Their awareness of themselves around others also grows.

- In these years, children can take on increasing responsibility for self-care skills e.g. dressing.

Pre-teen (10 - 12 years)

- This is a good stage for young people to begin taking more responsibility with homework and assignments.
- Preteens can begin to learn about bodily changes and relationships.
- Their opportunities to socialise on their own can increase, this includes learning to work through conflicts with peers.
- Skills and expectations around household chores can be developed to reflect their growing abilities.

Teenagers (13 - 18 years)

- Teenagers can accept responsibility for their own actions.
- Learn how to effectively resolve interpersonal conflicts.
- Continue to develop life skills such as household chores, budgeting, making meals etc.
- Become more responsible around all areas of relationships and sexual development.
- Learn to make important decisions.

What can parents do to promote independence?

- Offer your child choices and ask their opinion from a young age.
- Allow children to make mistakes, to experience success and failure.
- Include your child in everyday skills and tasks around the house, this is how they learn!
- Give your child responsibility with household chores. For example, to ensure the dog is fed every day.
- Involve your child in discussing his or her future e.g. living options, further education/training.
- Acknowledge that this may be a big change for your child. If they are not used to dressing themselves, for example, you may be met with some resistance. Start small, praise and encourage small victories and give it time.
- Acknowledge that this may also be a big change for you! As a child's independence grows your role as a parent must adapt. This can be a difficult transition. Be kind to yourself and know that you are teaching your child the skills they will need to develop into a confident and capable adult.

For more tips and ideas on surviving and thriving during Covid-19 restrictions, take a look at our article on [self-care and managing stress](#) or our list of [useful contacts and supports for parents and care givers](#).

Source: Enable Ireland Wicklow Services – Promoting Independence Workshop for Parents and Care Givers.