

Promoting your child's independence



Parents might notice that we have stopped helping their child to put on their coat and shoes and we have aprons for self-access outside. These are just some of the ways we are helping children to do things for themselves and become independent. We have been doing this with the children for a long time – giving them a spoon at meal times regardless of how messy things get and allowing them to be responsible for their own self-care such as washing their own hands (with supervision of course) and getting their cup from a tray in the conservatory when they are thirsty. At snack time, all the children take turns to chop fruit (we have child safe knives), put it on plates and serve each other – they love it when it's their turn to help.

These skills are really important for children to develop. Schools report they are seeing more and more children who cannot do things for themselves – they describe it as a type of 'learned helplessness' where children lift a leg to have their socks put on or shoes taken off and ask an adult to help with their coat rather than try to do it for themselves. Teachers say some children seem frightened of having a go at things for fear of getting it wrong.

We know it's often quicker to do things for children, so we build in extra time when we are getting ready to go out (for example) so we are not rushing. Even if they get it wrong to start with, we encourage and support the children to do it themselves. Parents might notice, for example, that they sometimes come home a bit sticky around their mouth after tea: that's because we praised them for trying to wipe their own face rather than doing it for them! It all comes off at bath time!

We let a child know that it's ok to make mistakes as well – we have plenty of wipes to mop up spills and cuddles if they get frustrated. We are keen to be consistent, so we use specific praise for everyone, supporting the older ones to encourage the little ones as well. This means when they first go into their classroom at school, they will be used to hearing the same words and phrases we use from the teachers.

We help the children to develop independence in a supportive environment and we share information with parents as we go along, so parents can help them to practice their new skills at home. We also ask parents to let us know the things their child is doing for themselves at home so we can try them here as well.

Please ask if you have any questions about how we promote your child's independence. Thank you.