

## Get-Ready Skills



## Paying Attention

Teach your child to pay attention either to you, to others, to rules, or to objects. Your child needs to be able to look or come when called, identify objects, and follow or imitate instructions.

Help your child pay attention by following these guidelines:

- **Stand near your child.** Make sure he or she can see and hear you.
- Get on your child's level. Position yourself so that your child can see your face, whether you are standing or sitting.
- **Call your child's name.** Wait until he or she turns to look at you before continuing. If your child doesn't look, say his or her name again. If your child still doesn't respond, take his or her chin in your hand and gently turn his or her face toward you.
- **Make eye contact.** Look directly into your child's eyes. If he or she doesn't look directly at you, put a finger gently on your child's chin and guide him or her to look at you.
- **Choose your words carefully.** Use simple, familiar words and short sentences to tell your child in simple, clear terms exactly what you want him or her to do (e.g., "Jenny, come play").
- **Be consistent.** Use the same words for people, places, and things all of the time.
- **Use gestures.** Your child will more easily understand you and more readily pay attention to you if you accompany your words with helpful gestures.

### The Cup Game

**Materials:** three paper cups  
small food rewards (e.g., M&Ms, grapes, Goldfish crackers)

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

This variation on the old carnival shell game is useful in getting your child to focus on an event. The objectives of this game are for your child to watch you hide food under one of three cups, to watch while you move the cups, and to pick up the correct cup on the first try. Use one cup. Hide an M&M (or other reward) under the cup. Say, "Find the candy." Help your child pick up the cup and find the reward. (He or she gets to eat it if he or she finds it on the first try.) Move the cup around a little, and help your child find the reward. Continue this until you can move the cup and your child can find the reward him- or herself. Next, add a second cup. Hide the reward under one and move it a bit, keeping the other where it is. When your child has mastered this, switch the positions of the two cups. Gradually, make the switches more difficult. Do this by moving the cups faster or more times.

**Note:** Make sure that your child is watching. He or she should be correct most of the time for this game to be useful. Don't let your child guess or always pick the cup in the same position. If he or she is missing the rewards, slow down the game. Add a third cup, but at first only move the cup with the reward. Next, move two cups, and then all three—slowly. Gradually make the switches more difficult. Move the cups faster, and include more switches.

**Variation:** Have your child be the teacher; let him or her hide the reward and switch the cups for you. Be excited when you find the reward.



## Playing Alone

### Play Skills

The skills your child gains when he or she learns new ways to play will be useful to him or her in other areas as well. Play can fill up empty time. Having appropriate toys available and knowing how to play with them gives your child something to do when there is nothing to do.

Use the Play Skills Checklist on pages 107-108 of **Steps to Independence** to determine a play skill to teach your child.

#### Establishing Steps

Make a short list of the steps in the skill you have selected to teach your child. First, write down what your child is able to do at the moment. Next, write down the goal. Finally, fill in the various steps toward achieving your goal.

#### Setting the Stage for Teaching

Setting the stage means deciding when and where to teach and what materials to use once you have selected a play skill. Think about how you will set the stage to teach a specific play skill.

#### Following Through

Give your child clear directions when teaching play. The most effective verbal instructions are those that 1) begin with the child's name, 2) are short, 3) include only words your child understands, and 4) are spoken clearly and firmly. Show your child what to do by modeling the activity. When telling and showing are not enough, put your hand over your child's hand, arm, or foot and physically guide the action. As your child learns to do the activity, fade out your physical guidance.

### Working Puzzles

**Materials:** a wooden puzzle with simple shapes

**Setting the Stage:** Begin with one piece, leaving all of the others fitted in the puzzle. Have your child's rewards ready.

#### Program:

1. Take the piece only a little way out. Say, "[Child's name], put it in." Use some physical assistance to guide your child if necessary.
2. Take the same piece halfway out. Say, "[Child's name], put it in," guiding your child as necessary.
3. Hand your child the piece. Point to the correct space, and say, "[Child's name], put it in." (Guide as necessary, but don't help too soon. Let your child try it by him- or herself for a bit first.)
4. Repeat this with each of the other pieces. Never take more than one puzzle piece out at a time. Gradually remove your physical assistance until your child can put a piece in by him- or herself once you've put it on the table.

#### Further and Final Steps

Increase the number of pieces you give your child. If your child struggles with a piece or becomes frustrated, back up a bit and give him or her a little physical guidance. Move away gradually. Eventually, you will spill out the whole puzzle and your child will be able to put it together.

### Play Skills

The skills your child gains when he or she learns new ways to play will be useful to him or her in other areas as well. Play offers countless opportunities to join in with a friend or with other family members and to be a part of what's going on. It provides a time when mistakes are not failures but just part of the game.

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### Beanbag Toss

**Materials:** beanbags (To make your own, fill socks with a combination of uncooked and puffed rice or hard, uncooked beans.)

**Setting the Stage:** Find a level surface outdoors or a space indoors that is free from clutter and breakable objects. If the game is to be played indoors, set some rules for the group (e.g., "The beanbags should be tossed at the target, not at the goldfish bowl").

#### Program:

1. Have your child stand 2 or 3 feet away from the beanbag target. Toss a beanbag. Say, "Throw the beanbag," then hand a beanbag to your child and help him or her throw it.
2. As your child becomes more skilled, gradually give him less help and move farther away from the target.

#### Next Steps

1. Mark several distances from the target. If you're playing outside, use chalk to draw lines at 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 feet. If you are indoors, use masking tape on the floor. Have your child begin on the first line and with each successful toss, move back a line.
2. Play a group game with teams. Assign points to be earned from each distance when the beanbag hits the target or lands in the basket. Keep score.

# Self-Care Skills

## Activities of Daily Living

Self-care skills are activities of dressing, grooming, and health care that your child needs to perform to get the day started and to have a good appearance in public. To get your child started on the path toward learning self-care skills, remind him or her of the four skill-performance questions to learning any activity.

Have your child make decisions by learning to ask—and to answer—four basic questions:

### 1. What do I need to do the skill?

In helping your child get dressed, ask him or her to consider what decisions need to be made. If your child has trouble, offer some help, but try to fade out your assistance as your child becomes more capable of answering these questions (or making decisions on his or her own).

### 2. What materials do I need?

To get your child thinking about materials, begin to make comments about them whenever he or she is performing a self-care skill. Get in the habit of making statements such as “Do you think this shirt is clean enough?” and “Where do we put the toothpaste when we’re done brushing teeth?”

### 3. Which step is first—and then next?

Rather than physically assist your child through the steps of performing a skill, ask him or her questions about what comes next when he or she performs a step. As your child gets his or her shoes out of the closet, you might ask, “What will you need to do before you put them on?”

### 4. When have I finished and done a good job?

For most self-care skills, a mirror provides your child with the answer to how well he or she has performed. Your job is to teach him or her how to perform that last-minute check. Use guiding questions to ask your child, “Did you miss anything? Is it on right? Does it look okay?”

## Problem-Solving Game

This game can be played during spare time. The idea is to create situations that may come up from time to time and to practice planning for the materials that would be needed at those times. The following questions give you an idea of situations that require materials. You, of course, should think of situations that fit your home and your child best.

1. “If it were raining now, what would you be wearing?”
2. “What would you need in order to sew a button on your shirt?”
3. “What do we take when we go to the beach?”
4. “What would you do if you got a little cut on your finger?”
5. “What should you pack in the toilet kit for an overnight trip?”
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

## Home-Care Skills

# Making Household Repairs

You can help your child identify and fix simple things that are “wrong” in your home. Once your child observes something wrong, talk to him or her about what needs to be done to fix the problem, what materials are required, what steps are involved, and when the project will be finished.

Help your child answer the following questions:

1. What do I need to do, and when do I need to do it?
2. What materials do I need?
3. Which step is first—and then next?
4. When have I finished and done a good job?

Your child can do several easy projects throughout the home. Consider the following activities:

- Put a new light bulb in a light socket.
- Close a window on a cold or rainy day; open a window on a warm day.
- Replace toilet paper or soap missing from the bathroom.
- Unplug a toaster after use.
- Turn down the television or radio.
- Straighten sofa cushions or a messy bed.
- Water a plant.
- Straighten a crooked picture.

Can you think of other simple fix-it projects? List them here:

### Bright Idea!

Replacing a burned out light bulb is a common household task. Use the following steps to teach your child how to change a light bulb. He or she will also learn the value of following steps.

1. Make sure the lamp is plugged in.
2. Check to see if the bulb is loose and gently turn clockwise until tight. Press or turn switch to test.
3. If original bulb is burned out, get a new one. Place the bulb where it won't get broken.
4. Unplug from wall socket, or turn off switch for ceiling light.
5. Remove the shade or cover, if necessary.
6. Unscrew the old bulb. (Shake it gently to listen for broken filament; you can also try it in another fixture to see if it is burned out.)
7. Screw in the new bulb until snug (but not too tight).
8. Plug in the lamp and test the bulb.
9. Replace the cover, if necessary.
10. Dispose of the old bulb in a safe place.

Why not take a few minutes now and make up your own list for a repair skill?