

An Age-by-Age Guide to Teaching Your Child Life Skills

This list of age-appropriate skills will help prepare your child for each stage of life as they develop from preschool until the day they leave the nest. Teaching your child life skills is not only important for self-care and sufficiency—it also allows them to feel empowered, works on socialization and reasoning, and helps develop healthy self-esteem.

Ages 2 and 3: Small Chores and Basic Grooming. This is the age when your child will start to learn basic life skills. By the age of three, your child should be able to:

- Help put his toys away
- Dress himself (with some help from you)
- Put his clothes in the hamper when he undresses
- Clear his plate after meals
- Assist in setting the table
- Brush his teeth and wash his face with assistance

Ages 4 and 5: Important Names and Numbers. Safety skills are high on the list now. She should:

- Know her full name, address and a phone number to reach you
- Know how to make an emergency call
- Perform simple cleaning chores like dusting in easy-to-reach places and clearing the table after meals
- Feed pets
- Identify money denominations and understand the very basic concept of how money is used
- Brush her teeth, comb her hair, and wash her face without help
- Help with basic laundry chores, such as putting her clothes away and bringing her dirty clothes to the laundry area
- Choose her own clothes to wear

Ages 6 and 7: Basic Cooking Techniques. Kids at this age can start to help with cooking meals and can learn to:

- Mix, stir, and cut with a dull knife
- Make a basic meal, like a sandwich
- Help put the groceries away
- Wash the dishes
- Use basic household cleaners safely
- Straighten up the bathroom after using it
- Make his bed without assistance
- Bathe unsupervised

Ages 8 and 9: Pride in Personal Belongings. By this time, your child should take pride in her personal belongings and take care of them properly. That includes being able to:

- Fold her clothes
- Learn simple sewing
- Care for outdoor toys such as her bike

(Ages 8 and 9 continued)

- Take care of personal hygiene without being told to do so
- Use a broom and dustpan properly
- Read a recipe and prepare a simple meal
- Help create a grocery list
- Count and make change
- Take written phone messages
- Help with simple lawn duties such as watering and weeding flower beds
- Take out the trash

Ages 10 to 13: Gaining Independence. Ten is about the age when your child can begin to perform many skills independently. He should know how to:

- Stay home alone
- Go to the store and make purchases by himself
- Change his own bed sheets
- Use the washing machine and dryer
- Plan and prepare a meal with several ingredients
- Use the oven to broil or bake foods
- Read labels
- Iron clothes
- Use basic hand tools
- Mow the lawn
- Look after younger siblings or neighbors

Ages 14 to 18: More Advanced Skills Are Learned. By fourteen, your child should have a very good mastery of all of the previous skills. On top of that, she should be able to:

- Perform more sophisticated cleaning and maintenance chores, such as plunging a toilet, cleaning the stove and unclogging drains
- Fill a car with gas, add air to and change a tire
- Read and understand medicine labels and dosages
- Interview for and get a job
- Create and maintain a calendar

Young Adults: Preparing to Live on His Own. Your child will need to know how to support himself when he goes away to college or moves out. There are still a few skills he should know before venturing out on his own, including:

- Make regular doctor and dentist appointments and other important health-related appointments
- Have a basic understanding of finances, and be able to manage his bank account, pay a bill, and use a credit card
- Understand basic contracts, like an apartment or car lease
- Schedule oil changes and basic car maintenance