 

**Being independent**

Children have a drive to be independent and do things on their own. This is a healthy part of normal child development. As children grow, they learn to do more and more tasks. We can help young children become independent by allowing and encouraging them to take responsibility for themselves whenever possible. It can be faster and less messy to do things for children, but they learn so much from doing things for themselves. When children practice self-help skills such as feeding and dressing themselves, they practice their large and small motor skills, gain confidence in their ability to try new things and build their self-esteem and pride in their independence.

Here are some ideas to try at home:

* **Self-feeding**. The children at nursery have been using a knife, fork and spoon for some time now. Some with more success than others, but all of them have tried and found their skills at this improving. Using a knife and fork involves hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills, perseverance and, once mastered, high self-esteem. Encourage your child to continue to practice using a knife and fork at home.
* **Independent dressing**. Most children enjoy choosing what they would like to wear each day. Giving children opportunities to make choices helps to build their sense of independence and problem-solving skills. Encourage your child to get dressed and undressed by themselves. Can they pull a jumper on and off? Can they put on their socks? Can they put on and fasten their shoes, on the right feet? Can they put on a coat, and fasten it?
* **Hygiene and toileting**. Encouraging children to take care of everyday hygiene routines and to use the toilet independently helps them learn how to become more independent and self-sufficient. At nursery, we have learned about the importance of hand washing; can your child talk to you about the steps for good hand-washing? Can they explain the reason why we wash our hands? Can they tell you when they need to wash their hands? Do they flush the toilet after use?
* **Helping with daily chores like table setting and picking up toys**. Encouraging children to help with jobs around the house helps them to be considerate, respectful and kind. In nursery, the children clear their own plates after lunch, wash their dishes after snack, and help to tidy away toys. When children are involved in regular chores starting before the age of 4, they tend to be more independent in early adulthood than children without the experience of helping out.

When children are learning and practicing new skills they need guidance and support. It can be frustrating to watch a child struggle to put their coat and shoes on, especially when we are in a rush. But taking the time to let your child practice will help them to develop the skills needed for busy days at school and nursery, and to become independent and resilient.