

Promoting Learning and Positive Behaviour at Home

Life skills for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

Resource 6



This resource is part of a series of seven booklets on Promoting Learning and Positive Behaviour in the Home developed by the NCSE Behaviour Practitioner team. The series is for parents of children and young people with additional needs.

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Booklets in the series

- Resource 1: Behaviour Support Pack for Children and Young People with Additional Needs
- Resource 2: Home Routines for Children and Young People with Additional Needs
- Resource 3: Using Reward Systems for Children and Young People with Additional Needs
- Resource 4: Behaviour Contracts for Children and Young People with Additional Needs
- Resource 5: A Total Communication Approach for Children and Young People with Additional Needs
- Resource 6: Life Skills for Children and Young People with Additional Needs**
- Resource 7: Transitioning for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

What are Life Skills?

Life skills are often referred to as independent living skills or daily living skills. Basic life skills include self-care activities, communicating with others, cooking, money management, shopping, keeping a room clean and organised and so on. These skills are learned over time, beginning at home at a very young age and developing further throughout adolescence and adulthood.

The overall aim in supporting children and young people with additional needs is to develop life skills and link these skills together to promote independence in all possible aspects of their lives. This builds self-esteem and confidence and ensures a sense of achievement which in turn increases happiness and wellbeing.

The tasks associated with learning life skills are complex and can involve many steps from beginning to end. Sometimes your child may need help to learn the skills involved. Breaking tasks down into smaller, more manageable steps is an effective strategy when teaching the skills. We call this task analysis. We all use task analysis at different times, for example using a recipe to make a cake or following instructions to assemble a piece of furniture.



Task Analysis

To design a task analysis for your child, you need to write down all the steps involved in an activity. These written steps are the plan you use to guide your child when completing the task. Using visual supports and/or verbal prompts can also help your child to understand each step involved in learning a skill. These supports demonstrate the sequence of the task for your child. Refer to the booklets on Home Routines and Transitioning for more information.

Simple ideas for the design of a task analysis:

Using the Toilet



Washing Hands



Brushing Teeth



Steps for breaking down a task for your child

1. Choose a home skill or daily living skill that you would like to teach your child.
For example, making a sandwich.
2. Break the skill down into steps, some children will need more steps than others.
3. Make a list and decide on the order. For some skills, the steps must be in sequential order, e.g, putting the filling on the bread before closing the sandwich. For other skills the order does not need to be sequential, e.g, during a dressing routine, your child might put on their trousers before their top or vice versa.
4. Decide how you will teach your child. He/she might respond best by learning one step at a time or alternatively by completing all steps of the routine together, a process known as chaining. Either way, it is important to provide lots of practice opportunities for your child to learn this new skill.
5. If your child needs help, plan how you are going to offer help. Sometimes you may show your child what to do and other times he or she may require hand over hand assistance.
6. Print or draw pictures to represent each step, if necessary.
7. Gather the materials you need for the task. For example, two slices of bread, a plate, a knife, a carton of butter, the filling for the sandwich and so on. It might be a good idea to choose a sandwich filler that you know your child likes.
8. Tell your child what you want him/her to do and use visuals to support the instruction, if necessary. For example, "Let's make a sandwich" while holding up a picture of the activity.
9. Remember your child will be able to complete some steps independently and may require support with more difficult steps. For example, your child may be able to put the butter on the knife but need help with spreading the butter.
10. Some children may require additional rewards during the task, for example praise, high five or a sensory toy. For others, the end product itself may be the reward.



11. If your child becomes upset or overwhelmed during the process, it's okay to take a break and come back to it. You will need to look at using additional rewards for this activity to support your child in the future. Refer to the booklets on Home Routines and Using Reward Systems for Children and Young People with Additional Needs for more information.
12. You may notice that your child is becoming more independent as he/she masters a life skill. As your child progresses with one life skill, why not teach a new one? Over time it is important to encourage your child to link these skills together, for example, setting the table, getting a cup of juice and sitting down to eat the sandwich. This will build independence and give your child a sense of achievement.
13. Now that your child is spending so much time at home, it is a good time to learn and practice new life skills. The steps involved in learning a new skill have to be **explained**, **demonstrated** and **practised**. It is also a good idea to use additional supports such as visuals, task analysis and rewards to help your child as they learn.



Top Tips!

- Practice a skill in real time e.g., brushing teeth before bed.
- Make sure the environment is calm so that your child can concentrate on the steps involved.
- Use visual supports and verbal prompts if they help your child.
- If your child needs extra practice, try to schedule this at a time that suits you.
- Some steps your child can do on their own, others they will need help with. That is okay.
- Try not to do it for him or her. This will slow down learning.
- Be patient. Give your child enough time to do each task.
- Encourage other members of the family to join in celebrating with your child when he or she uses the new skill.
- Repeat the skill often so that it becomes part of your child's skills set.

Useful Websites:

- <https://www.abaresources.com/free2/>

Useful Videos:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urxdUvRn98M>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_YXG780JNw

References:

- <https://www.twinkl.ie/>
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