

Developing and Supporting Your Child's Independence

The below benchmarks are cumulative and are reasonable expectations of children in each age range given an organized environment.

Keep in mind, the road to independence is not always easy and may not always progress in a linear way. These guidelines are intended to help your child do what they can for themselves. When we show children that we believe they are capable, they grow not only in the specific skill they are learning to achieve, but also in self-confidence that carries through into everything else they do.

	Toddlers (2-3 years) In an organized environment, toddlers can:	Early Childhood (3-6 years) In an organized environment, preschoolers and kindergarteners can:	Lower Elementary (6-9 years) In an organized environment, elementary students can:
Care of Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dress themselves and put socks and shoes on. • walk to class without being carried. • carry their own belongings to class and place them in their cubby. • hang up their coat. • open/close their lunchbox or food containers. • feed themselves from an open cup. • go to the bathroom independently (as long as clothing is not a hindrance). • entertain themselves (without the TV or electronic devices). • help brush their teeth and hair. • eat with utensils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help make their lunch (help make choices about which nutritious foods to pack). • help brush their hair. • help brush their teeth (with supervision and support). • dress themselves and put on a jacket/coat. • put on socks and shoes (even if they need help with tying...). • remembering their school bag, lunchbox, coat. • carry their own belongings to class. • hang up their own coat and school bag and put their lunchbox in the cubby. • go to the bathroom independently (as long as clothing is not a hindrance). • pour beverages and serve themselves. • eat with utensils. • clean up after themselves when done eating. • carry their dishes to the sink after meals. • climb into/out of the car seat/booster (kindergartener – buckle/unbuckle). • help clean up spills. • put work back on the shelf, books back in the bookshelf, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wake to an alarm clock, get dressed and ready for breakfast. • make their own breakfast. • remember to brush and floss twice daily. • fill their own water bottle. • pack their lunch with nutritious foods (shop together and identify healthy choices that would be appropriate to take). • remember to bring lunch, coat, water bottle, school bag to and from school. • carry belongings into class, hang up coats and bags and put lunchbox in the locker. • serve themselves. • complete homework by themselves and turn it in when due. • get into or out of their booster seat by themselves. • pick up after themselves. • put things back where they belong.

Never help a child with a task at which he feels he can succeed. – Maria Montessori

	Toddlers (2 to 3 years) In an organized environment, toddlers can:	Early Childhood (3-6 years) In an organized environment, preschoolers and kindergarteners can:	Lower Elementary (6-9 years) In an organized environment, elementary students can:
Care of Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clean up and put toys away in an orderly environment where items have a place. • help prepare meals (wash vegetables). • water plants. • clean up spills. • help wash the car. • help sweep (given a small broom and dustpan). • help carry some laundry. • Be respectful of other living creatures. • help with simple home chores such as helping make the bed or put dirty dishes in the dishwasher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help set the table. • sort silverware and put it away after it has been washed. • clean up spills; sweep floors. • put away their toys. • tidy their room. • help collect dirty laundry. Help sort clean socks, fold towels, etc. • be given responsibility to help keep the environment clean and tidy. • help prepare veggies/fruit for meals at home or to put into lunches. • help plant flowers or seeds, weed flower beds, water plants. • give water and food to a pet and help clean up after a pet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make their bed every day. • fold laundry and put it away. • feed and care for and clean up after pets. • put away toys, games, books, etc. • set the table for meals. • help do the dishes/load the dishwasher. • sort trash/recycling/yard waste. • sweep/vacuum floors. • read a book to parents, siblings, by themselves. • help with yard work (raking leaves, weeding, picking up debris). • help wash and clean up the inside of the car.
Interpersonal Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • let others finish a sentence before interrupting or asking a question. • follow social expectations of eating/drinking in designated areas and times. • learn to deal with frustration without having a parent solve or anticipate problems for them. • use words or signs rather than whine. • resolve conflict without physical actions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • show respect for others. • wait patiently without interrupting conversations. • use appropriate table manners. • understand not to take things without permission. • begin to solve problems with little or no interference from adults. • feel empathy for others. • practice grace and courtesy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • say please and thank you. • help others with their work. • solve problems with friends and adults. • take advantage of peer mediation when necessary. • apologize and make amends. • show respect for others. • exhibit grace and courtesy.

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	Toddlers (2 to 3 years)	Early Childhood (3-6 years)	Lower Elementary (6-9 years)
	But it is ok if your child...	But it is ok if your child...	But it is ok if your child...
But it is ok if your child...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is not independent at times. • needs to be carried sometimes. • makes a mess. He/she can clean it up. • complains a bit about doing what he/she has been asked to do. Stand your ground. • cries or whines at drop-off time. Just go and he/she will be fine. We will call if we need to reach you. • makes mistakes; these are opportunities for learning by trial and error. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complains a bit about doing what he/she has been asked to do. Stand your ground. • cries or whines at drop-off time. Just go and he/she will be fine. We will call if we need to reach you. • makes mistakes; these are opportunities for learning by trial and error. • is not perfectly matched. It shows he/she has been allowed to choose. • comes to school not perfectly groomed. • misspells words or writes letters or numbers backwards. • forgets his/her school bag on occasion. • temporarily misplaces an item. • brings leftovers for lunch. • is not eager to do academic work when he gets home (he/she has done a lot already at school). • is assertive about her needs or feelings – this shows valuable self-awareness. • thrives with repetition, relishing the opportunity master a skill and use it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes mistakes; these are opportunities for learning. • does not fold laundry perfectly or put in the right place in the closet or drawer. • feels frustrated by having to figure something out on his/her own. • must miss a favorite show to have time to wind down and read before bed or go to bed early to be able to get up in the morning. • spills and has to clean it up. • feels disappointed when told no. • must search for something that has been lost. • complains about doing homework or use the dictionary. • forgets his/her homework (occasionally) or have to explain to the teacher why homework is not done. • turns in imperfect projects/book reports that look like he/she did it rather than a parent. • is focused on quality rather than quantity of work. • complains about having to dress for the weather appropriately (natural consequences may be the best remedy). • is not able to explain everything done at school and why. • is not happy when you limit screen time only to certain times or until homework/chores are done. • is upset with a friend and must work to resolve the issue him/herself. • arrives to school in pajamas with a toothbrush, comb and clothes in a bag on a particularly difficult morning. • is held to different expectations than other parents have of their children.

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