

Disclaimer: Activities with children must always be risk assessed, including for allergies or choking. Children must always have adequate supervision. Resources and materials must always be appropriate for children's age and stage of development.

Top tips: Independence every day

As practitioners, nurturing independence in young children is not just about fostering self-sufficiency, it's about empowering children to explore, learn and grow confidently, laying the foundation for future development and success.

Here are some top tips to help cultivate independence in the children you educate and care for:

1. **Choices:** Give children the opportunity to make simple choices throughout the day, such as at lunchtime, ask if they would like a spoon or a fork. This gives children a sense of autonomy
2. **Self-help skills:** Encourage children to dress themselves, serve their own snacks and tidy up
3. **Small steps:** If necessary, break tasks or new skills into smaller, more manageable chunks, often referred to as 'backward chaining', and guide children through each step for example, putting on a coat - hold the coat up with the label facing out, lay the coat on the floor, put arms through the armholes and flip over head. Backward chaining is when the final step is taught first, working backwards from the goal. Assist with all the steps except the final one and let the child do it as many times as required until they can complete the task independently
4. **Environment:** Ensure the environment is conducive to promoting independence, for example, resources are within reach and easily accessible so that children can initiate activities and direct their own play
5. **Problem-solving:** Encourage children to think critically and solve problems independently. Ask open-ended questions to help them find solutions to challenges they encounter
6. **Risk taking:** Allow children to take safe risks to explore their capabilities
7. **Interactions with peers:** Encourage collaboration with others. Peer interactions provide opportunities for negotiation, sharing, and problem-solving which promote independence
8. **Role model:** Children learn from observation and doing, so let them see you completing tasks independently and with confidence. You could then offer them one of the steps, for example, putting the pineapple skin in the bin after you've peeled it
9. **Praise:** Offer praise for children's achievements, however small, as this helps them build confidence in their abilities and motivates them to try new things
10. **Patience:** Success takes time and practice. Be patient and allow children to make mistakes. Offer encouragement and support rather than stepping in to do it for them.



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NDNA products to support you with these tips

- Publication – [Open-ended play ideas](#)
- Face-to-face training – [Outdoor and risky play nursery training](#)
- Online training – [Exemplary practice with three to five-year-olds](#)

And more resources at www.ndna.org.uk/hub/myndna