

Preparing for independent living

As your child approaches adulthood, it is important for him/her to learn independent living skills and self-advocacy. Start these lessons early and keep them going on a daily basis. Begin by observing your child. Remove yourself from the equation and consider how your child would function without you there. Think about his/her hygiene, grooming, and behavior. How would your child react in an emergency? Can he/she prepare a snack or meal for himself? Can your child choose appropriate clothing for the weather or event?

You can teach these skills to your child over time, and now is the best time to begin. Start with basic skills, such as making a meal – even a sandwich – and doing laundry. Use schedules, breaking tasks down into smaller pieces. Below is a list of skills you may want to help your child master before it is time for him/her to leave your home.

Ask yourself whether your child can...

Grooming/dressing

- Dress/undress self
- Choose appropriate attire for occasion, weather
- Comb/style hair

Hygiene/health

- Use private and public bathrooms
- Wash hands
- Bathe without assistance
- Manage menstrual care
- Shave
- Use deodorant
- Brush teeth
- Floss, use mouthwash
- Treat a cold or other minor illness
- Call a doctor
- Manage medication – taking it as directed and getting refills
- Manage medical appointments

Planning/scheduling

- Tell time
- Follow daily routines
- Show up on time, in the right location
- Adapt to change in routine

- Prepare for a special outing
- Arrange special activities

Time management

- Plan homework time
- Make time to study
- Plan time for chores
- Arrange transportation

Social skills

- Use a telephone
- Practice proper telephone etiquette
- Take, relay a phone message
- Arrange a leisure activity
- Give gifts
- Remember birthdays
- Send thank-you cards

Household chores

- Keep living spaces neat
- Make bed, change bed linens
- Do laundry
- Plan, purchase, and cook meals
- Operate appliances
- Arrange for trash collection and utilities
- Plunge a toilet

- Identify things that require professional to fix

Money/shopping

- Handle money exchanges
- Make a budget
- Understand budgetary constraints
- Follow a list in a grocery store
- Ask for help in a store
- Make choices with cost comparison
- Withdraw cash from an ATM
- Write a check
- Pay bills on time

Restaurants

- Read menu (or alternative)
- Communicate with server
- Use manners
- Tally bill with tip

Leisure time

- Make travel arrangements
- Navigate an airport or train or bus station
- Use public transportation
- Navigate a new place when visiting

Perhaps most importantly, does your child know when and how to ask for help? Make sure he or she knows to call you when in doubt. Use the old clichés: "There's no such thing as a stupid question," and "It never hurts to ask!"