

10 Activities to Encourage Preschool Independence



by Amy June 4, 2015



"I'll do it! I'll do it!" is frequently heard coming out of my 3-year old son's mouth. Like most preschoolers, he is on a never-ending quest for independence and learning how to do things for himself. It's a fun phase but also can be challenging for busy parents. It was a challenge for me – especially when my 8-year old daughter went through this developmental stage.

Like with learning any new skill, independence-building activities can take more time to get done. There can be mistakes or accidents that require starting over or cleaning up. They may cause frustration and even temper tantrums or outbursts. They are not always practiced at the most opportune times (i.e. when you need to get to work or an important appointment). I learned these truths the hard way. When Olivia was little, I often took over when she failed the first time. If we were in a hurry, I would tell her "not right now" when she wanted to do something for herself. I often sighed when a spill happened.

I've since learned how important it is for preschoolers to practice independence skills and for me to practice my patience. I've witnessed the long-term benefits and, trust me, they are worth the extra time upfront. Here are some good preschool independence activities to start with.



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Activities to Nurture Independence in Preschoolers

1. **Picking out clothes.** This is a great activity to do at night before bed, especially if the morning is busy. You can also have children pick out clothes for the whole week on Sunday. **Fashion battles may happen**, but it's a good learning experience for everyone.
2. **Getting themselves dressed.** We're still trying to master this one. Owen gets very distracted or, rather, is a master of avoidance. I'm thinking an incentive or reward system may be needed soon in this area.
3. **Preparing breakfast or lunch.** **Mornings are busy in our house** and I love that Owen is now able to participate in breakfast preparation. Over time, we've been showing him how to get his own breakfast and he has now mastered making waffles in the toaster oven, getting his cereal ready – including pouring the milk, and spreading butter on toast. One challenge is helping him learn what is considered a proper breakfast food (i.e. lollipops are not okay).
4. **Preparing toothbrush and brushing teeth.** Having an older sister has helped in this area. The kids brush their teeth together so Owen has quickly learned how to put toothpaste on his brush, how to brush every tooth, and how to clean up after.
5. **Setting table or cleaning up the table after a meal.** Giving the kids a role in the family meal is not only great for building independence, but it also models the value of everyone pitching in with chores. We started by having Owen simply bring his plate over to the counter near to the sink. Over time, that has expanded to clearing his plate in the trash, bringing our plates over and putting condiments away.
6. **Putting away toys.** This one can be a struggle, especially when the playroom looks as if a tornado hit it. But we try to make this a priority as much as possible – and do it together! And you can easily make a game out of it – “Whoever gets a bin filled up, gets a hug!”
7. **Cleaning room – making bed, dusting, putting away laundry.** I'm now a firm believer in getting kids started early with chores – there are lots of **chores that kids can help do**. We struggle to motivate Olivia to pick up her room – I'm guessing it's because I always did it for her.
8. **Getting bath ready, washing body and hair, putting on pajamas.** This is one where we've always encouraged Olivia to take an active role in and now she pretty much does this without any guidance from us – except gentle reminders to get out of shower after 30+ minutes.
9. **Putting away coats, shoes, backpacks, lunchboxes when entering the house.** We have an entryway that can quickly become a dumping ground for the kids' stuff. We encourage both kids to hang coats, put away shoes, empty lunchbox containers into sink and stow backpacks.
10. **Taking care of a pet.** Feeding the dog/cat/fish, filling water bowls or cleaning fish bowls, walking the dog, giving pets a bath – there are so many responsibilities that preschoolers can take on when caring for a pet. An added benefit is that they learn about compassion and caring for others.



In our family, having our preschooler do all these *all of the time* just isn't realistic. We'd need 80+ hours in a day. But we do our best as often as we can because we've learned that encouraging preschool independence skills now has an amazing pay-off down the road.

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