

Life Skills to Teach Your Child



This timeline will ensure your teen is fully independent by the time she leaves the nest.

Katie Davis, Psy.D., a Manhattan-based licensed clinical psychologist, and Donna Volpitta, Ph.D., founder of the Center for Resilient Leadership, weigh in on what ages kids should start learning life skills. With each new skill, start by scaffolding the behavior: do the task together, model the behavior, and gradually let your child do the task on his own.

By 2-3, your child should be able to:

- Put dishes in or near the sink
- Put on and take off clothes herself and put shoes on the correct feet
- Clip himself into the car seat
- Start eating with silverware, and test food for temperature

By 4-5, your child should be able to:

- Wipe a counter with a sponge or cloth, and clear the table
- Wipe his shoes before entering the house
- Select proper clothing for the weather
- Recite her phone number, address, and emergency contact

By 6-7, your child should be able to:

- Prepare simple snacks, and help put his lunch together
- Put belongings away, including toys and dirty laundry, without prompting
- Tie shoelaces and keep them tied
- Do his bedtime routine independently, after prompting

By 8-9, your child should be able to:

- Take out the garbage
- Cut food with a knife and use a can opener
- Find a public bathroom on his own and replace an empty toilet paper roll
- Fold laundry and put it away

By 10-11, your tween should be able to:

- Vacuum the carpets and use a broom and dustpan
- Cook simple foods and operate a stove or oven safely
- Wash, dry, and put away dishes
- Take responsibility of his social life: make phone calls and plans with friends

By 12-13, your tween should be able to:

- Change her sheets and make the bed
- Know and select his clothing size
- Prepare a shopping list and cook a simple recipe
- Write an appropriate email

By 14-15, your teen should be able to:

- Perform simple household tasks, such as changing a light bulb
- Make minor clothing repairs
- Cook a meal for two people
- Find and apply to a summer job

By 16-17, your teen should be able to:

- Operate a washing machine, use an iron, and arrange for tailoring
- Cook meals for herself and others
- Perform basic car maintenance
- Take the lead in applying to college (see p. TK)



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