

Backward chaining

When a child finds something difficult, we often let them begin and then take over when they start to struggle by finishing the task for them. This can be unrewarding and frustrating for the child.

An effective way to develop self-care skills is to help at a different point in the activity. This process is known as backward chaining. Backward chaining teaches skills by breaking the task into steps.

The adult assists with initial steps and lets the child complete the final steps, giving them the opportunity to learn and practice a skill through having the satisfaction of completing the task and experiencing success. This is motivating and they are more likely to try again and keep practising.

Backward chaining for toilet hygiene – wiping self

Start by thinking about the different steps in the task. What is the last step?

Below are the steps.

For toileting, flushing the toilet is the last step.

1. taking paper/folding paper
2. wiping
3. checking if clean
4. putting the paper into the toilet
5. (repeat if required)
6. Flush the toilet

Complete all the steps of the task for your child until the final step.

Teach your child how to do the final step. You explain verbally or use your hands over theirs to show them how to do it initially and then allow them to take over.

Praise your child for their success and efforts!

Repeat the task in this way until your child has mastered the last step and can do it independently.

Then, complete all the steps of the task until the second to last step.

Teach your child the second to last step and repeat the process until they have mastered all the steps in the task.

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Backward chaining for putting on trousers from sitting on a chair or bed

Start by thinking about the different steps in the task. What is the last step?

Below are the steps.

For putting on trousers from sitting, stand up and pull trousers up to waist is the last step.

1. Hold trousers by waistband
2. Find label at the back
3. Lower trousers
4. Lift one leg into hole
5. Put other leg into the second hole.
6. Pull trousers up to knees
7. Stand up and pull trousers up to waist.

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Praise your child for their success and efforts!

Repeat the task in this way until your child has mastered the last step and can do it independently.

Then, complete all the steps of the task until the second to last step.

Teach your child the second to last step and repeat the process until they have mastered all the steps in the task.

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