

## Intellectual Disability: promoting daily living skills in adolescents

During early childhood, children begin to learn many self-care activities such as dressing, bathing, eating a meal and using cutlery. In adolescence, teenagers build on previously learned skills and become more independent.

Providing opportunities for a person to show independence in self-care is important because it helps to promote their confidence and participation. Adolescence is a time of negotiation around roles, expectations, and freedom. Within reason, parents/carers may expect some help with the household chores such as feeding pets, setting the table or cleaning the car.



## Intellectual disability and daily living skills

Teenagers with intellectual disability may need support from you and others to accomplish everyday activities. Each person's support needs will vary depending on the nature of the task, the person's disability, and their environment. While some people do not need help, others may need a little and others more.

It is important to have realistic expectations and consider what kind of support will help your teenager develop independence. While most teenagers learn household chores by watching their parents/carers this is usually not the case for teenagers with intellectual disability who may require more explicit methods to practice and learn.

If your teenager needs extra help with learning a new task try to provide support but don't make them go over and over a difficult task. Like all of us, teenagers need opportunities to do what they enjoy and to feel successful.

## Daily activities

Generally, children begin participating in daily living activities such as making the bed and putting away toys at around six or seven years of age. Children may begin attempting household chores like doing the dishes or sweeping up when they are a little older, usually after around eight years of age.

People with intellectual disability may take longer to learn these tasks. With appropriate support, it is realistic to expect teenagers with intellectual disability to help with chores at home.

Here is a list of activities that teenagers may be expected to carry out independently:

- make the bed
- put dirty clothes in the washing basket
- put folded clothes away

- return plates and food to the kitchen
- wash, dry or put away the dishes
- prepare own lunch/snacks.

## Learning a new activity

Each of us has a preferred learning style. Some people prefer to learn by listening, others by seeing or doing. For best results when teaching your teenager new skills, consider tailoring your methods to their learning style.

## Step-by-Step

Sometimes breaking a task into small steps and teaching one step at a time can make it easier for your teenager to learn the whole activity. For example, to make a hot drink:

- fill the kettle
- boil water
- fetch teabag, milk, sugar, teaspoon and cup
- put teabag and sugar in the cup
- pour the hot water
- add milk and stir
- remove the teabag
- pack everything away.

## Backward chaining

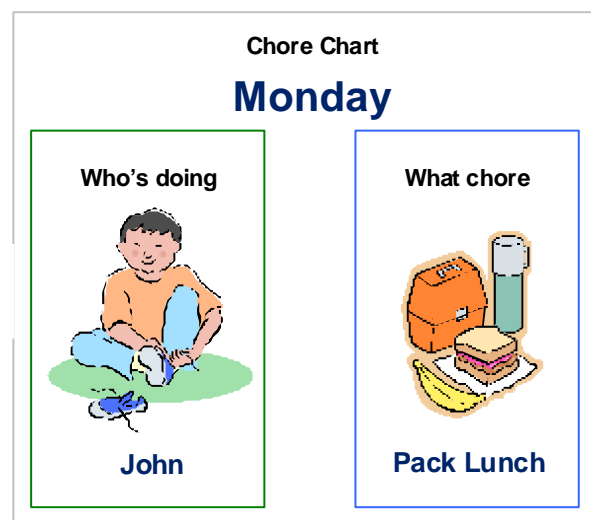
'Backward chaining' is a technique that you can use to assist your teenager to learn a new daily living skill. This involves you completing all but the last step of the task. Your teenager then completes this final step. The process continues as you complete one less step and your teenager does one more, ensuring that success is achieved at each step, until they can do the whole task on their own. By doing this, your teenager receives instant success and this increases their motivation and confidence. For example, when teaching your teenager to make a hot drink, the first step to learn is "pack everything away".

## Chore charts

Teenagers may find that chore charts are a useful way to help them remember their household chores like taking out the rubbish, feeding the cat, or bringing in the mail.

A chore chart displays a range of household activities across a day or a week to help your teenager see what needs to be done.

Your regional office can help you develop a chore chart.



## **Pocket money and household chores**

Pocket money will vary greatly from family to family. Older teenagers may find it useful to earn extra money through a part time job or work experience. This also helps them learn more about what they want to do as adults.

Most teenagers do not favour payment for individual jobs, preferring a more generalised payment or pocket money. However, they may think that 'big jobs' should receive a special payment/extra pocket money. Most teenagers expect to do some household chores, but generally expect you to prompt them to act.

## **Praise, give more credit than is due!**

Give praise. Your teenager needs to know that their efforts are seen, appreciated and recognised, and that you are proud of their successes. Teenagers may receive very little positive feedback from their peers. Generally, the main way in which teenagers get positive feedback is from their families/carers.

Here are a few praises you can try out:

- "Good on you for...(taking the bin out)"
- "I'm proud of you for...(setting the table)"
- "I really liked the way you...(cleaned up the bathroom when you were finished)"
- "I like the way you...(help out)"
- "Congratulations on...(a job well done)"
- "You did a good job with...(cleaning your room)"
- "I have to say I was really impressed with...(how you folded the washing)"
- "Thank you very much for...(doing the dishes)"

You may not always get a positive response from your teenager but your praise will go a long way to increasing their self esteem.

## **Wellbeing and support**

Parents/carers don't always find it easy to teach their teenagers daily living skills: it requires lots of effort and persistence! Taking time out may be hard when times are tough but it is essential for you to take good care of your health to cope with the physical and emotional demands of raising a teenager. Many parents/carers find it hard going juggling competing priorities like work, finances, health and family. Parents/carers need time to take care of themselves in order to cope with the physical and emotional demands of raising teenagers.

## **Some ideas on ways to support yourself:**

- ring a friend
- talk to a relative
- go to a community health centre or parent group
- attend counselling
- spend time doing something that gives you enjoyment
- contact us for support and advice.

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