TURNING PAGES,
BUILDING FUTURES

LEARNING WHERE LIFE HAPPENS

When Your Child Needs You for Everything

Building independence without simply saying “do it yourself.”

Short on time? Jump to page 3 for the one-page Independence Builder.

Start Here

Your child can do it - you've seen them do it. But somehow it still ends up waiting for you: the shoes, the snack, the cleanup, every step with “come help.” Here's the honest starting point: children need support to learn a skill, but once they know the routine, too much adult help can make it harder to practice doing it on their own. And just as honestly - the answer isn't suddenly withdrawing all help. This is about changing how the help shows up, a little at a time.

The big idea: Independence grows when support changes as skills grow.

Nobody learns to ride a bike by having the steadying hand disappear without warning. Support that shrinks as skill grows - a little less doing, a little more waiting - is how children go from “you do it” to “I did it.” The goal was never to stop helping. It's to help in ways your child can outgrow.

Try This: help without taking over

Pause before helping

Try: When the call for help comes, wait a few beats before moving. Look expectant, not unavailable - the face that says “I think you've got this.” That beat of space is where initiation gets its chance.

Point instead of telling

Try: If your voice usually narrates every step, try pointing instead - and let the environment provide some of the information. The jacket on the hook says “shoes first” without a word from you.

Give the smallest helpful prompt

Try: Support without doing the task for them: a tap, a look, the first word of the sentence. The right-size prompt is the smallest one that works - and it keeps shrinking as your child grows into the routine.

Let them finish what they started

Try: Resist taking over because it's faster or neater. Hand the last sock to your child; let them push the zipper the final inch. Ending the task with “I did it” instead of “we did it” is quietly powerful.

Set the environment up for independence

Try: Put materials where your child can reach them: cups low, shoes in reach, the cleanup basket open before the activity starts. A child who can reach it doesn't need to ask for it.

Notice attempts

Try: “You tried the zipper yourself!” counts, even when the zipper won. If only perfect finishes get noticed, trying alone isn't worth much.

Hand over a whole step

Try: Instead of sharing every task down the middle, give your child one whole step to own - they handle the shoes while you handle the jacket, they pour the milk while you get the cereal. Owning a real piece of the routine, start to finish, builds something that a share of everything can't.

Let small mistakes happen

Try: The zipper comes out crooked. The sandwich is a little lopsided. Resist the redo - quietly fixing it after they finish tells your child their work wasn't good enough, and takes back the ownership you just handed over. Not everything needs to look right to have gone right.

Pick one routine - not all of them. Independence grows fastest where it's easiest to practice.

What to look for

You don't need to collect formal data to notice whether something is helping. Over a week or two, watch for:

- ☐ Starting without waiting for you
- ☐ Needing fewer prompts
- ☐ Completing more of the routine on their own
- ☐ Looking for materials independently
- ☐ Trying before asking for help

One small change is information - and a place to build from.

If it doesn't work...

If the waiting isn't turning into trying, that is not a verdict on your child - it is information. Ask:

- Does my child actually know how to do this - or is a piece of the skill still missing?
- Is the step too large to win?
- Are the materials actually within reach?
- Am I waiting long enough for them to start?
- Am I giving too much information at once?
- Does my child have a reliable way to ask for help when they genuinely need it?

Remember: Doing less for your child doesn't mean supporting them less. Sometimes the most helpful thing you can do is leave room for them to try.

Want more practical ideas?

Explore more PAGE resources for communication, learning, participation, independence, and everyday routines. Explore PAGE Resources → Or, if you'd like occasional practical ideas delivered by email, **join the PAGE list at pageaba.com.**

Need help figuring out what to try?

If you've tried a few strategies, made adjustments, and still aren't sure what to change, PAGE can help you find practical ways to build communication, participation, learning, and independence into everyday life. **Learn more or schedule a consultation at pageaba.com.**

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The Independence Builder

Pick one routine. Sort what your child can already do from what still needs help - then decide how you'll practice handing it over this week.

My child can already...	My child needs help with...	I can try...

This week, I'll give my child a chance to do:
I'll help by:
I'll watch for: