

Tips for Learning Life Skills

Here are tips for how to help your teen gain independence with adaptive and life skills.

Hygiene and Self Care

- Create a social story (or several) about showering, body odor, and hygiene.
- Use visual aids, such as picture books, to help educate your teen about proper hygiene.
- Prepare a hygiene kit so that your teen has everything they need for staying clean and taking care of themselves. This may include pump bottles or flip-top caps for shampoo, conditioner, and body wash to make them easier to use.
- Create a shower routine. You could post a laminated sheet in the shower/bathroom with the shower steps, and use pictures or icons instead of words if that is helpful.
 1. Use shampoo and scrub my hair
 2. Rinse out shampoo
 3. Use conditioner and spread on hair - let it sit in my hair
 4. Wash my face, arms, stomach, feet, and legs with soap
 5. Wash under my armpits with soap
 6. Wash around my vagina/penis with soap
 7. Rinse out the conditioner from my hair
 8. Dry my body with a towel
 9. Use the same towel to dry my face, arms, stomach, feet, and legs
 10. Use the towel to dry my armpits
 11. Use the towel to dry around my vagina/penis
 12. Put deodorant under my armpits
 13. Get dressed into clean clothes





Depending on your teen's needs, you may need to break down these steps even more. For example,

1. Turn on the water and get it to a temperature you like.
 2. Pump one squirt of shampoo into your hand and rub it on your hair. Scrub the top, sides, and back of your head.
- Have your daughter practice wearing pads before she begins her period so that she can get used to taking care of feminine hygiene
 - Create a visual schedule or set alarms to document when your teen needs to shower, put on deodorant, change their pad/tampon/menstrual cup, etc
 - Find products that are unscented for your teen if they are overstimulated by smells

Cleaning and Chores

- Create a chore chart or list of daily and weekly chores using words, pictures, a checklist, phone app, or whatever system is best for your teen
- Label things to make it easier to put them away
 - Coat hooks
 - Drawers
 - Shelves or cubbies
 - Bins
- Post visual instructions and steps for tidying bed, washing dishes, using washer and dryer, etc.
- Use video modeling for tasks like taking out the trash, emptying the dishwasher, etc.
- Create a system with colored bins for trash and recycling. Include a list or pictures of what should go in each bin.
- Introduce cleaning toys, such as a small brush and broom to practice household chores
- Sprinkle some powder or something small on the carpet to help your teen see where to vacuum and understand when they are finished. You can do the same thing with dusting furniture.



Food preparation

- Teach your teen how to prepare food in different ways to help with food aversions. Typically an aversion is caused by texture or presentation, so cooking something in a different style might help. For example, prepare eggs scrambled, sunny side up, and hard-boiled.
- Break down recipes into small organized steps which may or may not include pictures or symbols, such as:
 1. List the utensils and appliances needed
 2. List the ingredients and the amount
 3. List instructions in small, simple steps
- Prepare lessons that focus on one or two specific skills to make learning to cook more manageable
- Educate your teen on what to do in case of a fire or medical emergency while cooking

Time Management

- Use technology and other tools to help with organization and time management, such as:
 - Cell phone and tablet apps
 - Google alerts and calendars
 - Binders and organizers
 - Hard calendars
 - Sand timer
 - Digital clocks and watches
- Create a daily schedule
- Communicate about the importance of time management

Community Navigation

- Provide visual or virtual maps for community public transportation
- Teach basic safety skills for different forms of transportation
- Help your teen understand that transportation systems might have traffic or delays
- Use a map app on a phone or tablet to give walking directions.



Money Management

- Have your teen practice paying for items at the store
- Give your teen a small allowance to help them learn how to save for important or special items
- Look into helping your teen open a basic bank account or savings account if they eventually plan on handling money independently. Some financial institutions will allow a teen account as early as 13 years of age.
 - Some financial institutions provide more support and accessibility than others. Some also have training for employees on how to better interact with an individual with ASD.
 - Practice navigating the online banking app so that your teen can understand how to manage their account.
 - Visit the local branch your teen will use so that they can get familiar with the staff
- Create a visual or written schedule/chart to track payments and savings

Safety

- Depending on your teen's capabilities, practice using a cell phone so that they understand how to operate it in case of an emergency
 - Program emergency numbers such as parents or family members, crisis intervention, 911, etc.
- Teach your teen how to recognize "safe people" such as police, firefighters, and security guards when they need to ask for help
- Use role-play to practice what to do if a stranger approaches them
- Practice crossing a street and teach your teen other aspects of street safety
- Create visual aids to help your teen recognize hazardous cleaning supplies or chemicals
 - Create a list of steps on how to properly handle these supplies
 - Include what to do if mishandled, such as rinsing your eyes with water, calling the poison control center, or seeking immediate help
- Prepare visual aids to help your teen understand how to take care of basic first aid. You can also incorporate video modeling to help teach your teen.
- Prepare a first aid kit with everything organized
- Allow your teen to practice basic first aid while supervised. If they need assistance feel free to help. You can also find educational videos online, as well as community classes on basic first aid.



References:

- Autism Awareness Centre:
<https://autismawarenesscentre.com/whats-cooking-life-skills/>
<https://autismawarenesscentre.com/teaching-the-concept-of-time/>
<https://autismawarenesscentre.com/how-to-teach-money-management-for-independent-living-with-autism/>
- Autism Society of North Carolina:
<https://www.autismsociety-nc.org/household-chores-teach-independent-living-skills/>
- Autism Speaks:
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/expert-opinion/teen-autism-needs-help-hygiene-appropriate-behavior>
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit-excerpt/community-living>
- Car Autism Roadmap:
<https://www.carautismroadmap.org/time-management-and-other-executive-functioning-issues-in-the-workplace/>
- Center for Autism:
<https://life-skills.middletonautism.com/strategies/work/household-chores/strategies-for-chores/>
- Organization for Autism Research:
<https://researchautism.org/preparing-children-on-the-autism-spectrum-for-travel/>
- The Australian Parenting Website:
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/health-wellbeing/toileting-hygiene/personal-hygiene-autistic-teens>
- The National Autistic Society
<http://life-skills.middletonautism.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/10/Managing-Money-Workbook.pdf>
- Association for Science in Autism Treatment
<https://asatonline.org/research-treatment/clinical-corner/teaching-safety-skills-to-adolescents/>