

January Spotlight

Life skills to teach your child which will benefit the whole family

The following document is based on an article in '*Verywell family*' written by Apryl Duncan. Apryl updated her article on 2/11/22 and her ideas were reviewed and medically approved by Ann-Louise T Lockhard PsyD ABPP.

Life skills are valuable lessons that children will use throughout their lifetime. Early access to these skills will result in a fulfilled and happy childhood and a purposeful adolescence. Life skills include decision making skills, meal preparation and communication skills.

Don't miss the opportunity to teach your children these important lessons before they hit their teenage years. Above all, your pre-school and Pre Prep children will be clamouring to learn and enthusiastic to master skills that they perceive to be 'grown up'.

The following 11 skills have been highlighted by Apryl as essential for your child to learn and highly desirable for you in the long term. On this topic it appears that the effort this might take at first will be hugely rewarded in time.

1. Decision Making

It is important to gain practice in making good decisions from an early age so that children will eventually appreciate the rewards of good decisions and the consequences of bad decisions. Helping very young children to make decisions between sock colours or ice cream flavours will effortlessly lead to being able to consider the pros and cons of much more important choices in teenage years. The process will evolve in complexity as more options need to be considered.

2. Health and Hygiene

Explain why health and hygiene will always be a vital part of every person's daily routine. Set up a tick sheet or a star chart for bathing/showering, teeth cleaning, hand washing and changing underwear. As these healthy habits become established it will not be necessary to use a chart as your child will have incorporated the aspects of health and hygiene without having to be reminded.

3. Time management

Most primary school teachers will agree that learning to tell the time is one of the hardest concepts to instil in their youngest pupils. Parents appreciate the benefits from having children who can measure time effectively, stay on task and keep to a schedule. Begin by helping children to understand exactly how long 10 seconds, 5 minutes and one hour is. Use an analogue clock, a sand timer, a digital readout to assist children to recognise the passage of time. Give gentle prompts and keep those prompts in real time such as...'in 5 minutes you must stop this activity and go in the bath...' and then follow through with an accurate 5-minute time frame between the warning and the actual end of the time. Being able to manage time is always an essential ingredient of success in teenagers and adults.

4. Food preparation.

Even the youngest children can learn to prepare a sandwich or to use a microwave safely. Once children have some food preparation knowledge you can enlist them to help with simple tasks involved in making a more complex meal for the whole family. As children gain confidence, they will be able to put together a nutritious packed lunch involving healthy food choices and with supervision from an adult they will eventually be able to cook hot food.

5. Money management

Teach your children about money from an early age. This is particularly important as so little money visibly changes hands in this cashless society. Children should be given a small allowance. The allowance or pocket money should be divided so that some is saved, and some is wisely spent. Help children to work out change when they give more money than necessary to buy an item. Ensure they also understand the value of money when one uses a credit card or a banking app on a mobile phone. Be certain to emphasise the using plastic or online banking does not mean things are being purchased for free.

6. Cleaning

The enthusiasm of the youngest members of your family to help out around the home must be capitalised upon when opportunities arise. Instead of balking at the effort needed to accommodate a child's offer for help always make the most of every chance to empower and motivate a child through participating in household chores. Make sure you select easily manageable chores which are age appropriate, safe and fun. Dusting is a harmless activity which is most satisfying for even the youngest child and if it is done in a patchy manner, it will not be life threatening.

7. Laundry

Even toddlers can help out with laundry. The youngest children can sort clothes by colour and put them into the washing machine while older children can learn to programme the machine and add detergent. Everyone can help with shaking, hanging or drying clothing in a tumble dryer while it is easy to teach children how to fold clothes and put them away in the correct draw or cupboard.

8. Comparison Shopping.

When your child is determined to buy a toy or a game and is demanding that you purchase it straight away take the opportunity to look up the item in various other local shops and online and show your child the price of the item in each shop. Get your child to work out where the best place would be to purchase the desired item and also ask them if they think the price is reasonable.

9. Ordering in Restaurants

By allowing children to politely order their own food when waiting staff come to take the order you are offering them a fun experience which also boosts their confidence and self-esteem.

10. Getting dressed and ready.

Children can learn to get ready in the morning independently from a very early age. Help them by setting out all the necessary items in a logical manner the night before. Include a hairbrush and toothbrush as well as some visual instructions detailing the order of completing each morning task. The independence you instil doing this will really help to streamline your morning family routine.

11. Home Maintenance

Easy jobs which are essential for the smooth running of the house can be assigned to young children to help them feel responsible and valued in the house. Emptying waste paper baskets, changing toilet rolls and perhaps emptying the lint tray in the tumble dryer are all manageable and valuable tasks.

Do not underestimate the value of allowing your youngest children to make a contribution to family life, even if you have to re-do some jobs at first. Very quickly your child will gain the independence and skill to work efficiently and safely and this will definitely benefit you and other members of the family.

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