



中華人民共和國
香港特別行政區政府
教育局



香港教育大學
The Education University
of Hong Kong

Parent Seminar on “Let kids go, let kids grow – The art of promoting young children’s self-care skills”

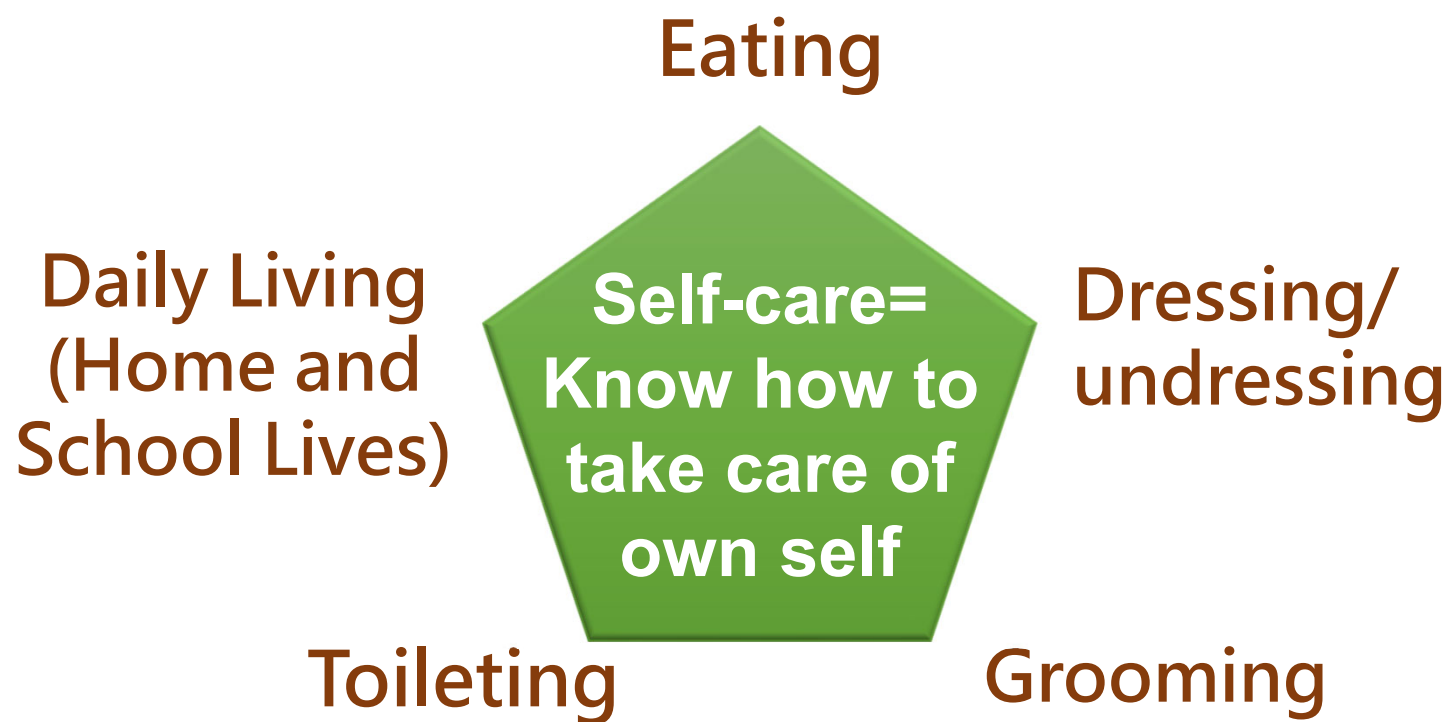
Dr. Sum Kwing CHEUNG
Co-director, Centre for Child and Family Science
The Education University of Hong Kong

Myths about self-care skills (1)

Self-care = Know how to
get dressed him/herself ?



What do self-care skills include?



(Heep Hong Society, 2013b)

What do self-care skills include?

(1) Eating

- Oral muscle control
- Drinking
- Eating
- Handling food packaging



(Heep Hong Society, 2013b)

What do self-care skills include?

(2) Toileting

- Express the need for toileting
- Distinguish between male and female toilets and identify the proper place for toileting
- Can dress/undress during toileting and avoid getting wet
- Sit on the potty or use the toilet
- Wipe after toileting

(Heep Hong Society, 2013b)

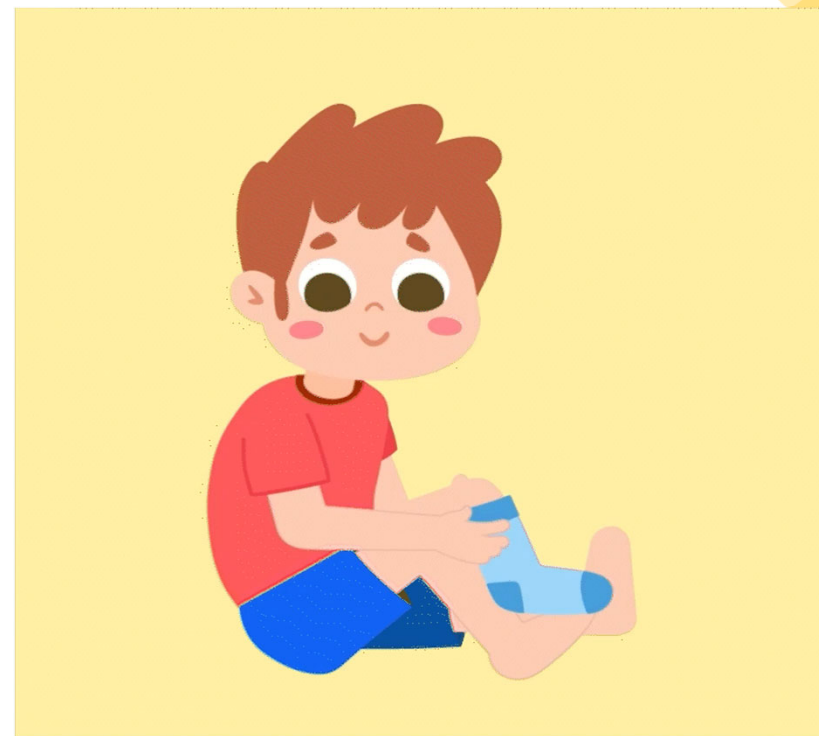


What do self-care skills include?

(3) Dressing/undressing

- Dress/undress
E.g., shoes, socks, pants, vests, shirts, coats and t-shirts
- Handle clothing fasteners
E.g., hook-and-loop fasteners, shoelaces, zippers, buttons

(Heep Hong Society, 2013b)



What do self-care skills include?

(4) Grooming

- Comb hair
- Brush teeth and rinse mouth
- Wash the body (*including washing hands, washing face, bathing, washing hair, etc.*)
- Wipe the body (*including hands, face, mouth, nose, etc.*)
- Care for the skin (*including use of body lotion, lip balm*)
- Cut the fingernails

(Heep Hong Society, 2013b)

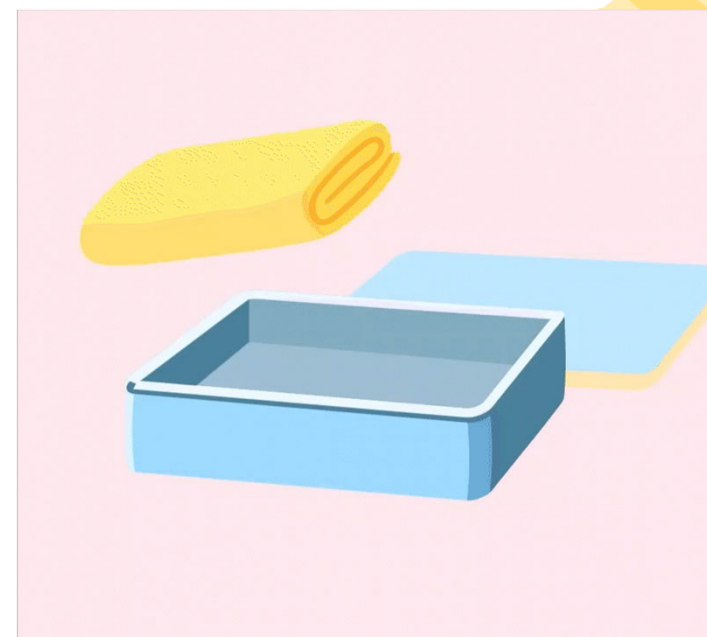


What do self-care skills include?

(5) Daily Living

- Tidy up daily necessities (*e.g., toys, books, stationery, tableware, clothes*)
- Cleaning (*including wiping the table, cleaning the tableware*)
- Use facilities and equipment at home (*e.g., doors, windows, electrical appliances*)
- Use public facilities (*e.g., elevators, lifts*)

(Heep Hong Society, 2013b)



Myths about self-care skills (2)

Self-care skills are fully developed at age 3-4



Development of self-care skills



Young
children at
the age 0-6
have different
self-care skills
to learn

Myths about self-care skills (3)

The development of self-care skills has little impact on other areas of development

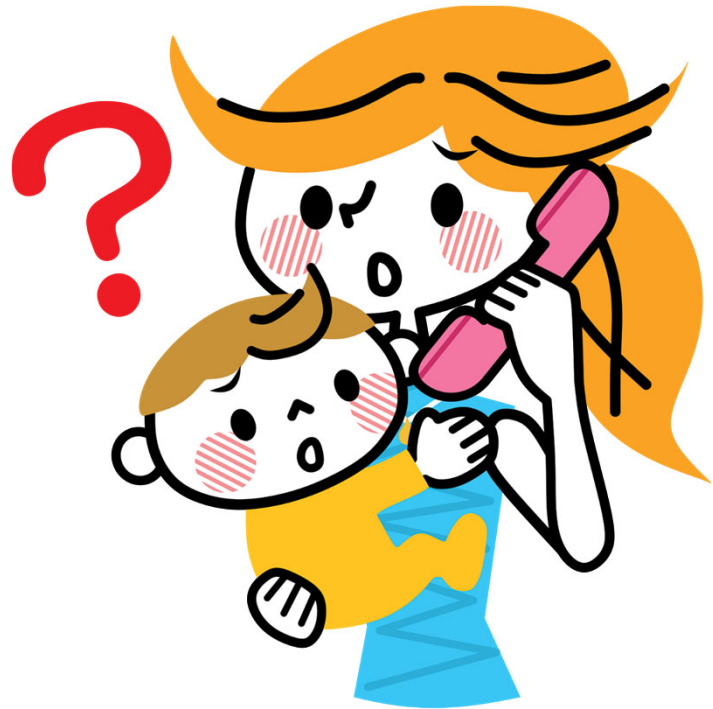


Importance of developing self-care skills

Self-care skills and other areas of development are closely related to and affect each other.



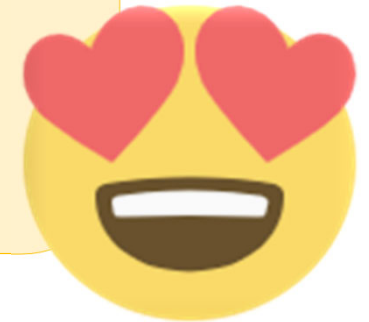
Parent Talk



Why does my
child still fail to
take care of
him/herself?

Case 1

I have a 4-year-old son. I take good care of him. I call him “BB” all the time. He eats messily. He is clumsy but adorable. Therefore, I sometimes ask him to open his mouth so that I can feed him. He really looks like a baby when opening his mouth. He is really cute. He would put on his coat in a wrong way. He is so funny. He is still young, and it is normal that he doesn’t know much about self-care. I would help him more with daily care now, and let him take care of himself two years later.





Parent Talk

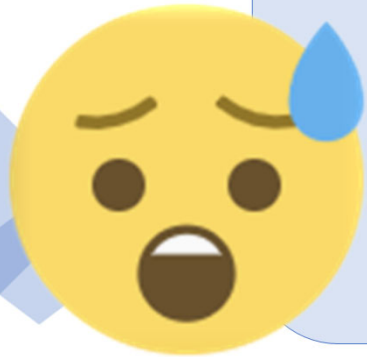


The host's
initial response

- Do 4-year-old children really know nothing about self-care?
- Parents should not hinder their child from developing self-care skills because of the child's lovely appearance!
- Parents' indulgence would hinder their child's development in self-care skill!

Case 2

The teacher told me that my son did not know how to use the scissors and keeps asking me to let him practise the skill more at home. This is really annoying to me. At first, I let my son use the scissors himself. However, he cannot master the skill even I have taught him many times. The paper is not cut properly. He really wastes a lot of paper and time. Moreover, he often points the scissors towards his body. I give up and help him cut the paper.



It is much more efficient, and the paper would be cut more nicely. He would know how to use the scissors when he gets older. It is not necessary for him to learn how to use the scissors now.



Parent Talk

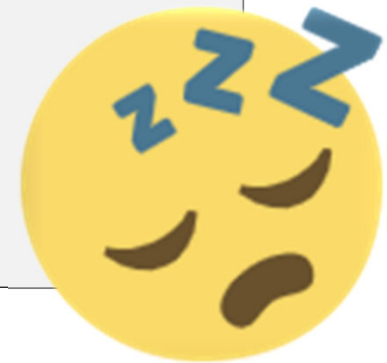


The host's initial response

- The belief that the child would acquire a skill naturally when he/she gets older would deprive children of their opportunities to learn new skills.
- Allow your child to try and make mistakes under safe conditions. This is the best opportunity for learning!
- Don't impose your own standards on your child. Parents should think from children's perspectives!
- Give your child more trust and patience. It takes time and practices to master a self-care skill.

Case 3

I am always mad at my daughter in the morning since it is so hard to get her out of the bed. It is always rushing to go to school and tutorial classes. Therefore, I help her brush her teeth and wash her face. I even help her get dressed when she is still on the bed. She takes forever to chew food and this always drives me crazy. She always stares at the tablet even when we are in hurry. I am so angry but all I can do is to help her wear her socks and shoes, take up her bag, carry her and rush out.





Parent Talk



The host's initial response

- When parents get angry with their children and blame them, have parents tried to understand why their children do not want to get out of the bed, take forever to eat and always stare at the tablet?
- Have you ever considered the many factors contributing to children's behaviors? Do you realize that you might be one of the causes of children's behaviors?
- Children need appropriate guidance and assistance from their parents to develop self-care skills!

Case 4

My child is obedient and willing to learn. Since he was small, he has been able to tuck the tail of his shirt inside his pants, fasten the buttons and wear shoes. He sometimes does not accomplish these tasks well. For example, he would only tuck part of the tail of his shirt inside his pants, button up wrongly and pull up one of his socks. I think all these are fine as long as he can perform the tasks. I would help him get dressed more properly as it is important for him to look neat and charming when going out.





Parent Talk

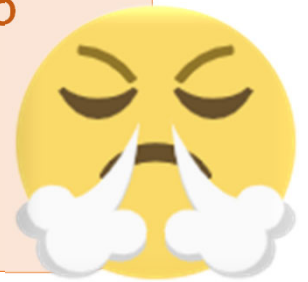


The host's initial response

- Although we should allow our children to make mistakes and be tolerant, we should not have too low expectations. Parents should not let children be sloppy and careless!
- Parents should set proper expectations for children's self-care skills and gradually increase their expectations step by step according to children's age and learning progress.
- Parents should not help their children to complete unaccomplished self-care tasks for the purpose of maintaining a good appearance and outcome.

Case 5

My child is in K3 and will go to primary one soon. He is now learning how to pack the schoolbag. I ask him to follow the timetable and put relevant books into the schoolbag lesson by lesson, so that he would not miss any books. However, he often gets the wrong books. Therefore, I ask him to put the books into the schoolbag according to the size of the book. Nonetheless, he still makes various mistakes. Finally, I ask him to follow the student handbook and put the Chinese, English and math textbooks into the schoolbag one by one. Even though there are only a few books for his kindergarten studies, he still uses an hour to finish packing the schoolbag. I once asked him to hurry up, as he had to attend the piano class. He cried and said he didn't know what to do. I had already spelt out the instructions, but he lost his temper and became reluctant to pack the schoolbag.





Parent Talk



The host's initial response

- When parents mention that they have told children the instructions very clearly, does it necessarily mean that children understand the instruction thoroughly? Can the child remember all the instructions?
- To help children learn self-care skills, parents should use age-appropriate language and methods, provide demonstrations, or use proper tools (e.g., cue cards, posters).
- Self-care skills and emotion management are related to each other. Parents should not ignore the need of emotion education for their children. Parents should be considerate about children's feelings and provide more encouragement.
- Parents should manage their own emotions well when teaching their child.

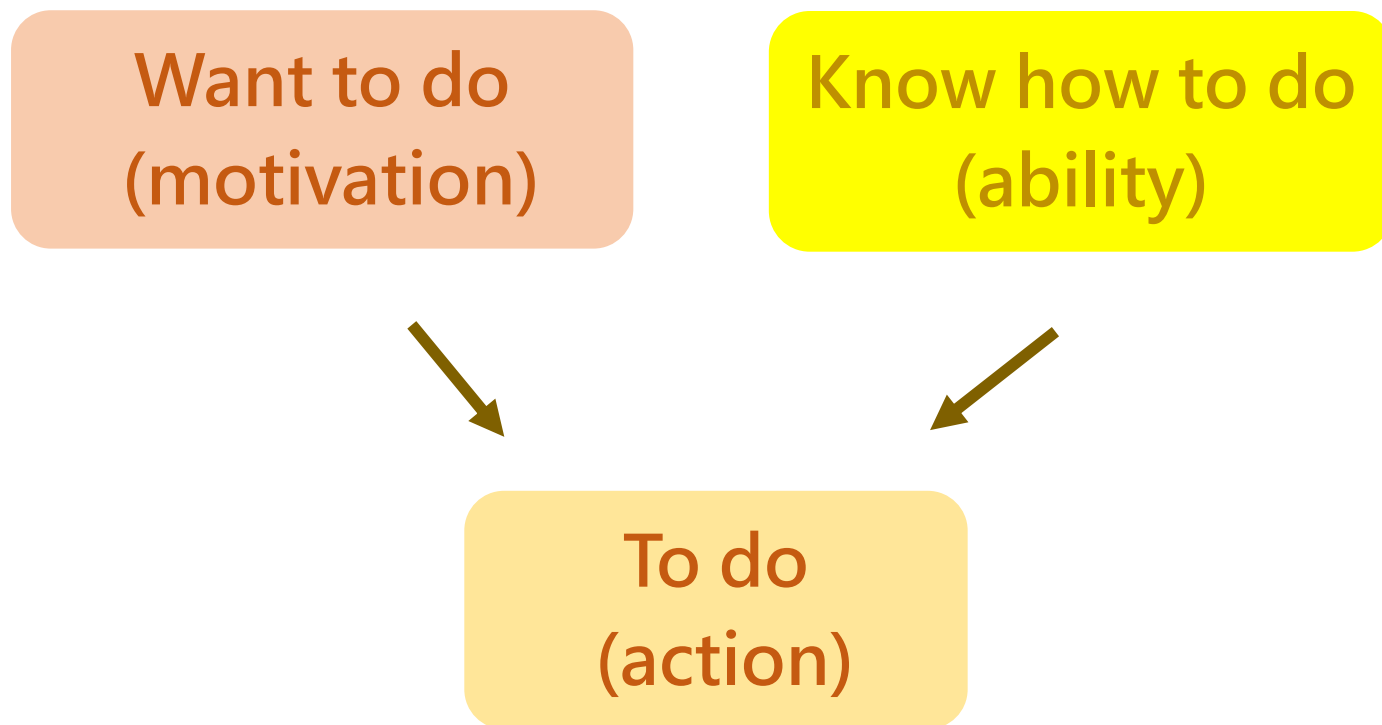
Parents' concerns stem from two main issues:

Don't know
when to
let go



Don't know
when to
intervene

When will children act?



Why do parents need to let children go ?

- Parents' overindulgence of their children would make them reluctant to discipline their children's behaviors.
- Help children become responsible and independent
- Reduce children's dependence on others, so as to enhance their problem-solving skills and resilience
- Let children explore and reach out on their own, so as to actualize their potentials and promote their creativity

Why do parents need to **intervene**?

- Children need to learn self-care skills through training
- Parents need to guide their children's self-care skills according to their children's development and abilities
- Overindulgence makes the child more prone to go their own way or easily give up
- Children need parents' feedback to understand their rights and wrongs, and the keys and cautions for mastering a self-care skill
- Cultivating good habits and attitudes in children can help promote their self-care skills

How to "let go"?

(1) Don't be helicopter parents

Don't:

- over-care
- over-worry
- over-protect
- be overly involved



How to "let go"?

(2) Adjust your mindset

Children cannot do it!

How do you know
they cannot do it
if they haven't
tried?

Rome was not built in a
day. It is normal to
experience failure during
the learning process.

How to "let go"?

(2) Adjust your mindset

It is dangerous for children to complete the task on their own!

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graph TD; A[It is dangerous for children to complete the task on their own!] --> B[Parents would stay with their children during the process!]; A --> C[Knowing how to self-protect is one of the important lessons in life!];
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Parents would stay with their children during the process!

Knowing how to self-protect is one of the important lessons in life!

How to "let go"?

(2) Adjust your mindset

Children are slow and clumsy.
It would be better and faster if
I complete the task for them!



Practice makes
perfect!



Don't stop children from
trying because of your
reluctance to clean up messes!

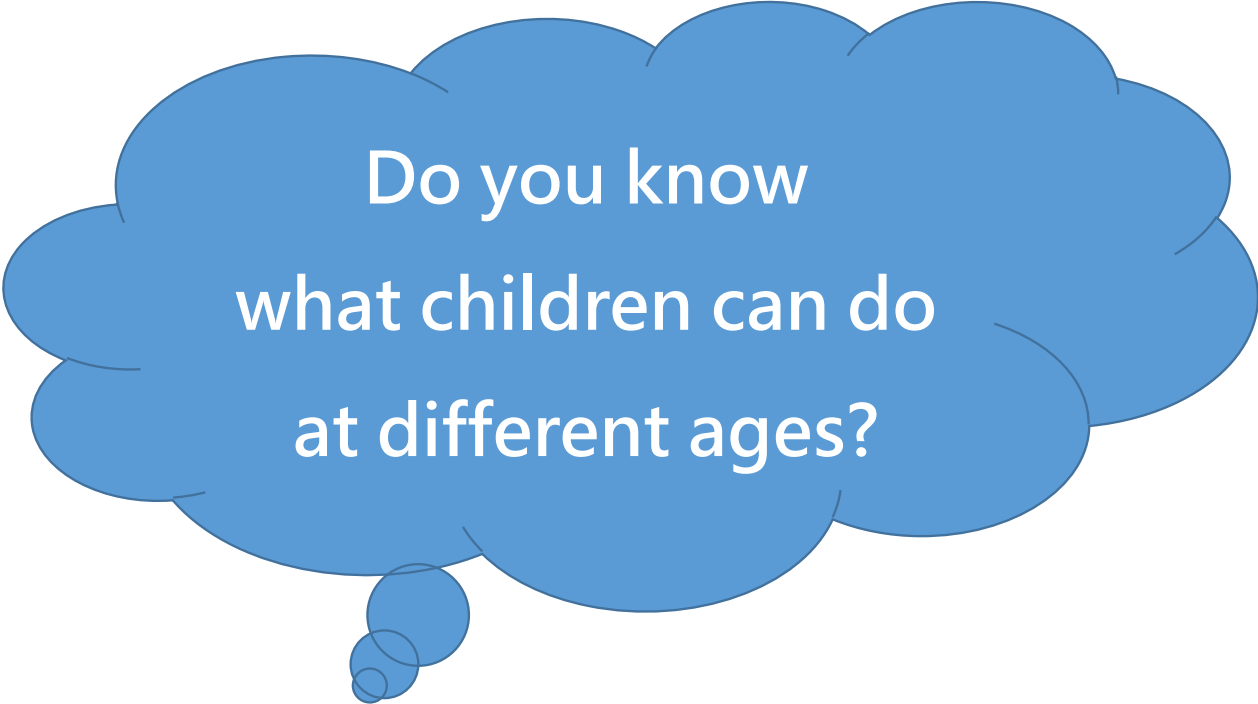
How to "let go"?

(3) Hold appropriate expectations for children's self-care skills

- Teach children according to their **age** and **abilities**
- Do not expect children to act as **fast** and **efficient** as adults



Do you know ...?



Do you know
what children can do
at different ages?

<Eating>

Age 2 – 3

- Eat with **spoon**
- Get food with **fork**
- Drink with a **cup** independently without spilling out

Age 3 – 4

- Use **chopsticks** to push the food into the mouth
- Cut soft food with **knife**
- Handle carton drinks without spilling out

Age 4 – 5

- Use **chopsticks** to grab food
- Pour drinks out **from a small bottle** without spilling out
- Remove **food packaging**

(Heep Hong Society, 2013a)

<Toileting>



Age 2 – 3

- **Express** the need to toilet



Age 3 – 4

- **Flush** the toilet after use
- **Identify** the signage of boys and girls' toilets



Age 4 – 5

- **Sit still** on the adult toilet
- **Tear** the required amount of toilet paper



Age 5 – 6

- After pooping, **tear** the required amount of **toilet paper**, fold it up and get ready to clean up
- After pooping, use toilet paper to **clean up**

(Heep Hong Society, 2013a)

<Grooming>

Age 2 – 3

- Use a **toothbrush** to brush their teeth roughly
- **Rinse the mouth** with water

Age 3 – 4

- Turn on/off **water tap**
- **Wash hands** with soap

Age 4 – 5

- Wring out the **towel**
- **Wipe face** with towel

Age 5 – 6

- **Bathe** him/herself
- Use a comb to **comb hair** tidily him/herself

(Heep Hong Society, 2013a)

<Getting dressed>

Age 2 – 3

- Pull off **socks**
- Take off **trousers**
- Take off **jackets** or **shirts**
- Buckle **velcro**

Age 3 – 4

- Wear **shoes**
- Wear **trousers**
- Wear **jackets** or **shirts**
- Unfasten and fasten large buttons

Age 4 – 5

- Differentiate left and right shoes
- Wear **socks** correctly
- Wear and take off T-shirts
- Use open-end **zipper**

(Heep Hong Society, 2013a)

<Daily living>

Age 2 – 3

- Put his/her own toys in a fixed place
- Put a folded towel in the box

Age 3 – 4

- Wrench open a door
- Use the buttons in a lift

Age 4 – 5

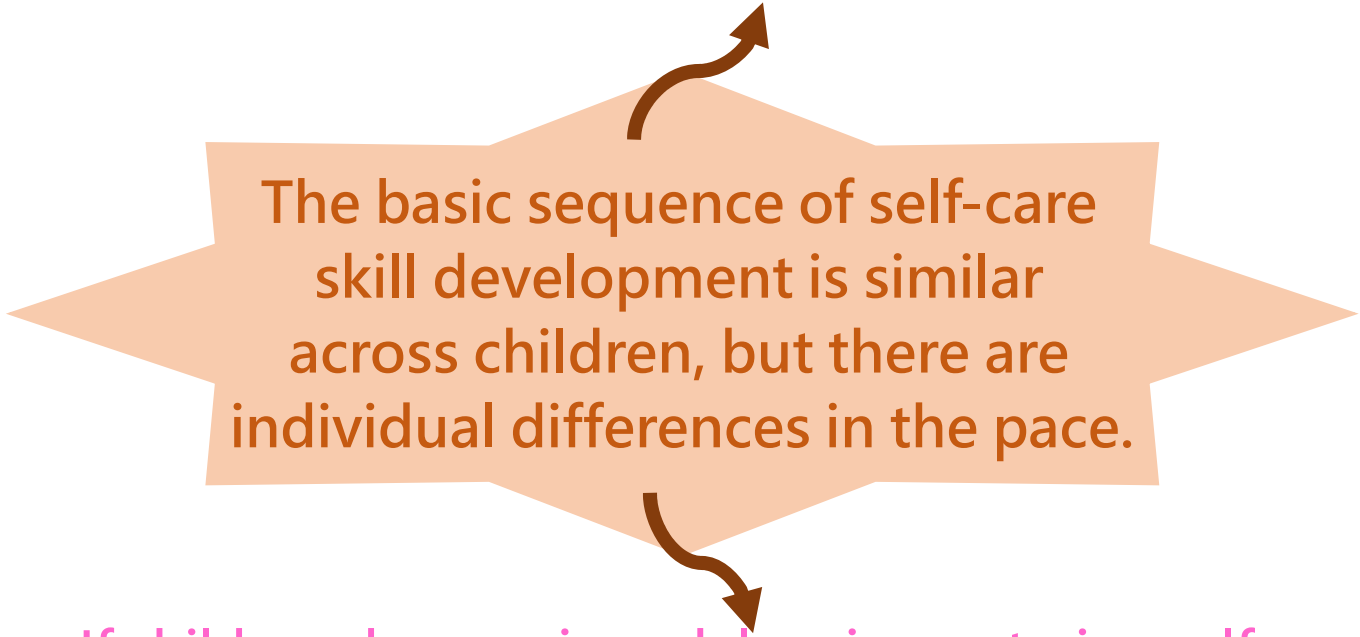
- Hang a jacket on a hanger
- Use escalator

Age 5 – 6

- Clean up dishes after meals and gather dirty bowls and dishes separately
- Follow traffic rules

(Heep Hong Society, 2013a)

Self-care skill development is closely related to other aspects of development, such as gross and fine motor skill development, body coordination and cognitive development.



The basic sequence of self-care skill development is similar across children, but there are individual differences in the pace.

If children show serious delays in mastering self-care skills expected for their ages, parents need to keep an eye on children's developmental progress and seek advice from experts.

(Heep Hong Society, 2013b)

Have I really "let go"?

(1)

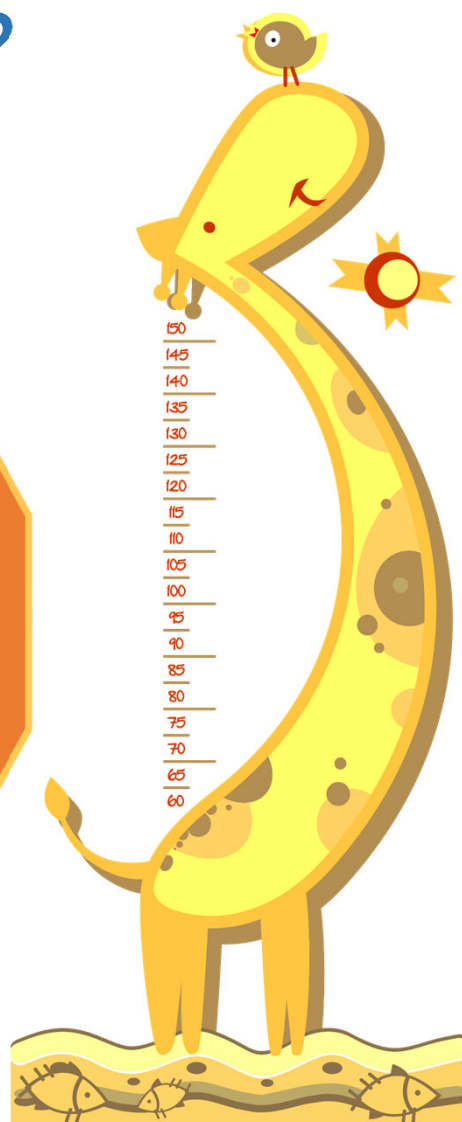
Do not always
call your child
"baby"!



Have I really "let go"?

(2)

Have you told
your child **clearly**
about your
expectations for
his/her self-care
skills?



Let the child
have clear
goals and know
well your
behavioral
expectations

Have I really "let go"?

(3)

Hold on!

Let the child accomplish
the task by him/herself.

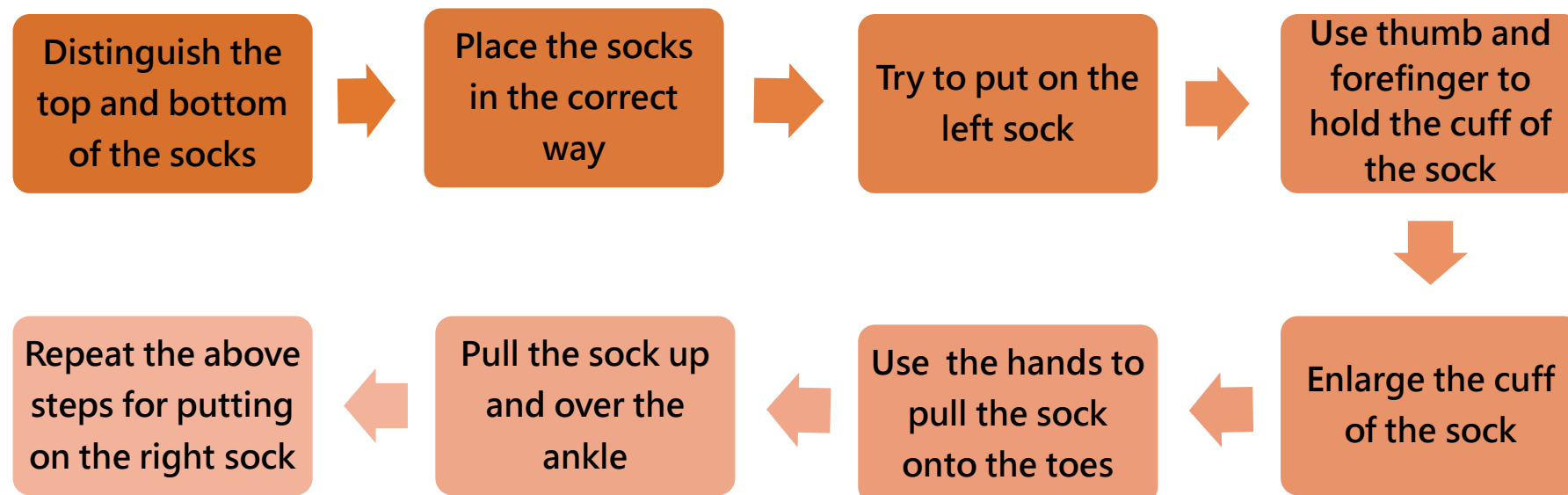
Don't complete the task
for the child because of
your impatience!



How to teach self-care skills?

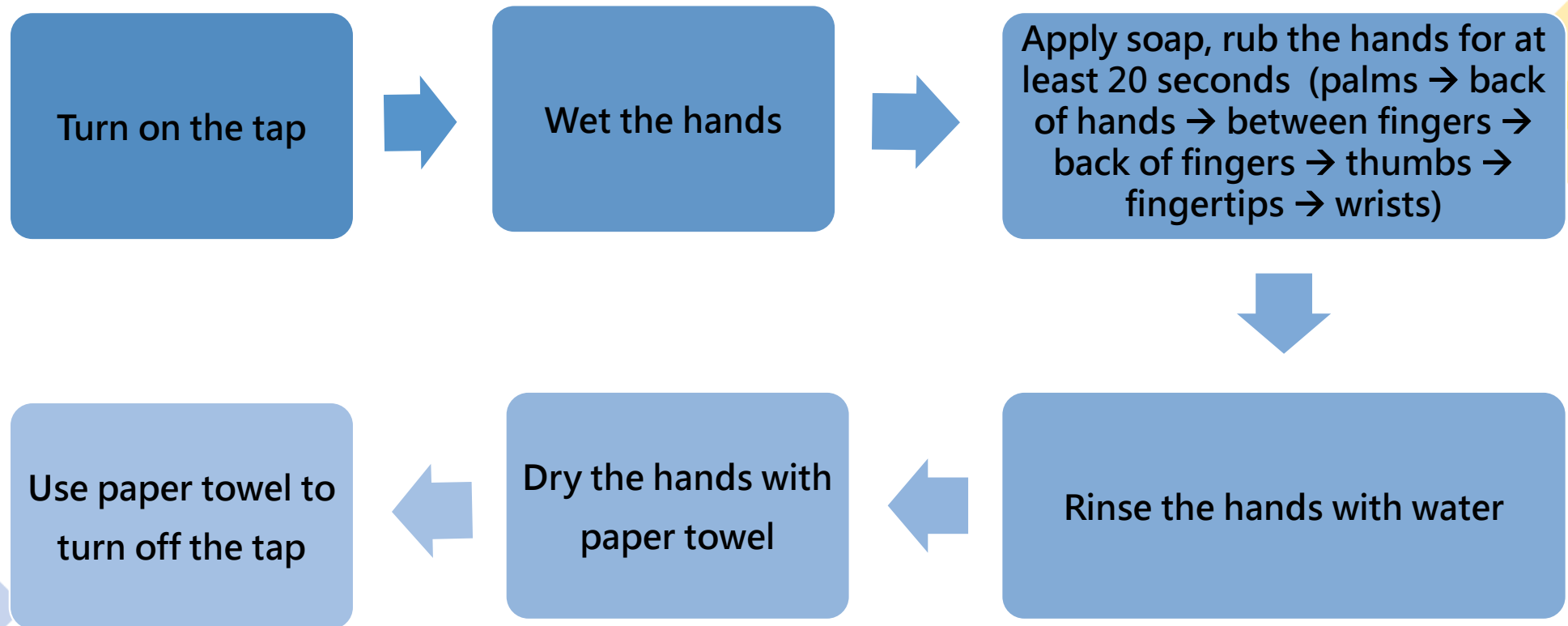
- (1) Break the skill down into a series of steps, highlight the points that require more attention, and demonstrate each step clearly; increase the task difficulty and reduce help gradually

Example – Wearing socks



(Heep Hong Society, 2013b)


Example – Washing hands




(Heep Hong Society, 2013b)

How to teach self-care skills?

(2) Practise self-care skills in everyday life



Speak encouraging words to children more, to help children think that they have the self-care ability



Provide concrete feedback to children for their self-care behaviours

How to teach self-care skills?

(3) Provide guidance during the learning process

- Point out the steps and main points clearly
- Use visual descriptions, metaphors and mnemonic to strengthen children's memory and understanding
- Utilize various open resources (e.g., library resources, online books and nursery rhymes about self-care skills)



How to teach self-care skills?

(4) Use various types of encouragement to maintain and reinforce children's self-care behaviors

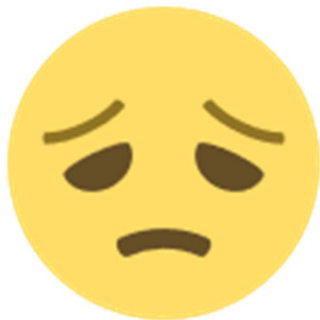
- Praise and encourage children more to improve their persistence and confidence
- Have an appropriate reward system

Points to note when setting up a reward system



Children have
intrinsic
motivation for
self-care

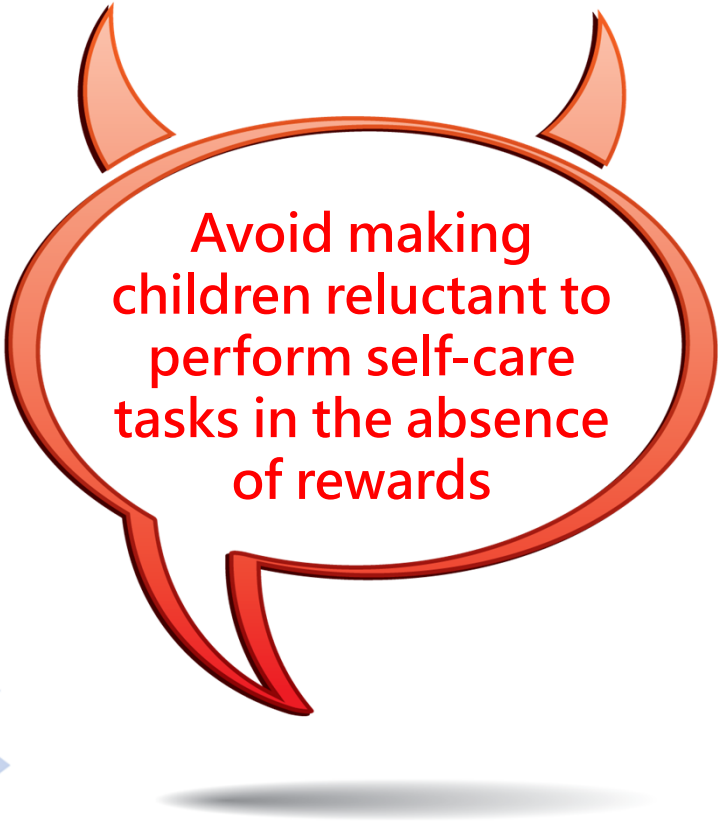
Can reduce or stop the
use of reward system



Children do not
have a strong
motivation for
self-care

Can use the reward
system in a proper
manner

Points to note when setting up a reward system



Avoid making children reluctant to perform self-care tasks in the absence of rewards

- During the process, it is important to emphasize more the target behaviours rather than the rewards. It is then easier for parents to adjust the goals and increase the task difficulty step-by-step.
- Apart from physical rewards, parents can reward children by increasing the amount of play time or parent-child reading time.

Points to note when setting up a reward system

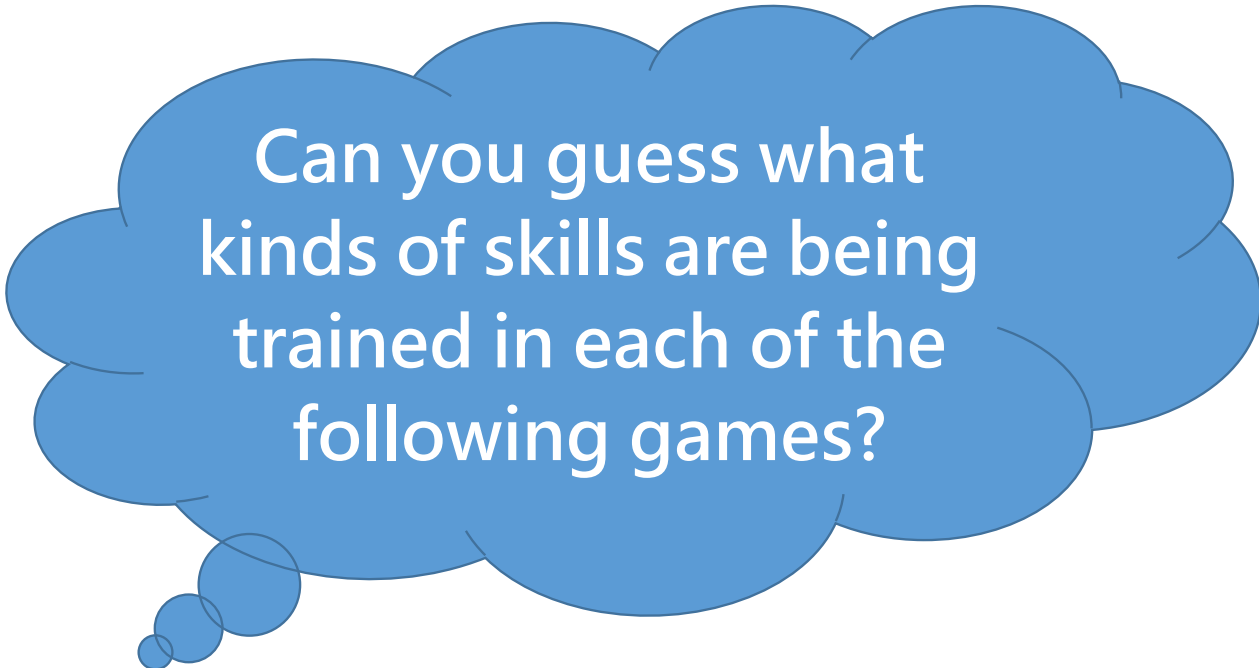
- The target is too easy \Rightarrow Do not have motivation to accomplish the self-care tasks
The target is too difficult \Rightarrow Cannot accomplish the self-care tasks; feel frustrated; give up easily
- At the initial stage, parents can perform the self-care tasks together with children; at the later stage, parents should let children try themselves
- Need to increase the task difficulty and reduce the time given to accomplish the tasks based on the extent to which children can accomplish the self-care tasks independently
- Children gain a sense of satisfaction when they are able to accomplish the self-care tasks, after which they will change the extrinsic motivation (rewards) for self-care to intrinsic motivation.



Need to
adjust the
goals
regularly

How to teach self-care skills?

(5) Let young children practise self-care skills through play



Can you guess what kinds of skills are being trained in each of the following games?

How to teach self-care skills?

a) Screwing game



Train how to use the first three fingers and eye-hand coordination skills

⇒ Open plastic bottle caps

How to have more fun?

- Adjust the difficulty level according to children's age and abilities
 - Increase task difficulty: Make it a competition (e.g., accomplish the task within a limited time, sort and match by colour or shape)
 - Decrease task difficulty: Parents accomplish part of the task first and let children do the rest themselves (→ Can boost children's confidence to accomplish the task)
- Use daily objects (e.g., plastic bottle caps of different shapes and sizes) and ask children to do matching
- Make up a story

How to teach self-care skills?

b) Bead transferring game



Train how to use the first three fingers, how to control the amount of force used, and eye-hand coordination skills

⇒ Use tools to pick up objects (e.g., eating)

How to have more fun?

- Use objects of other textures (e.g., picking up pom-poms of different sizes, putting the pom-poms into containers of different sizes and shapes)
- Use objects that make sounds (e.g., small jingle bells)
- Use different types of tongs (tongs of different sizes, lengths, shapes and uses)
- Let children make decisions (e.g., children determine which types or colour of objects are to be transferred)
- Parents play together with children

How to teach self-care skills?

c) Hot pot game



Train how to use different tools to pick up objects, and eye-hand coordination skills

⇒ Use chopsticks to pick up food of different shapes and sizes

How to have more fun?

- Use objects of different textures and sizes
- Make it a competition

How to teach self-care skills?

d) Treasure hunting game



Train fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination skills

⇒ Use tools to hold / pick up objects (e.g., using different eating utensils)

How to have more fun?

- Include a wide range of target objects (e.g., objects of different types, sizes and weights), so as to help children learn the amount of force to be used and the skills of gripping/holding different objects
- Use different tools (e.g., chopsticks, tongs, spoons) to increase the task difficulty
- Add obstacles
- Create a story when setting up the game, so as to promote children's creativity and imagination

How to teach self-care skills?

e) Feeding game



Train how to use tools to hold / pick up objects and eye-hand coordination skills

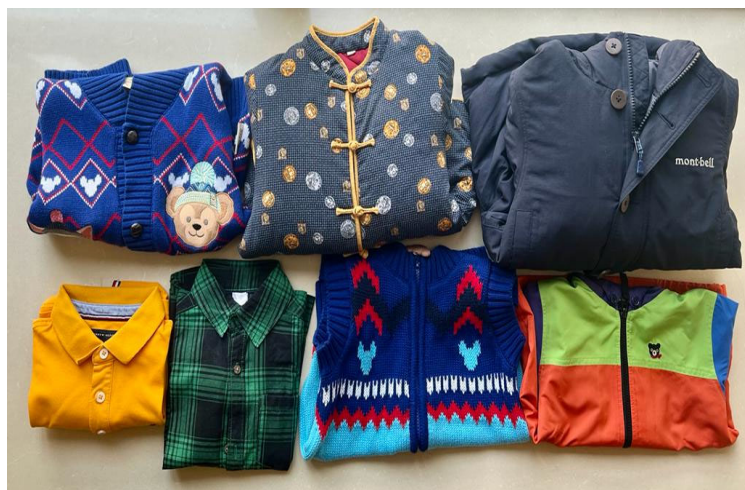
⇒ Use different eating utensils to put food of different shapes and sizes into the mouth

How to have more fun?

- Use objects of different shapes, sizes and textures as food
- Use different tools (e.g., chopsticks, spoon, fork)
- Add obstacles

How to teach self-care skills?

f) Dressing game



Train eye-hand coordination skills and speed of actions

⇒ The ability to dress/undress (e.g., putting on or off different types of clothes, fastening different types and sizes of buttons, zipping and unzipping)

How to have more fun?

- Make it a competition (e.g., putting on as many clothes as possible, fastening as many buttons as possible within a limited time)
- Add criteria for success (e.g., putting on clothes of a selected colour, fastening buttons of different types)

How to teach self-care skills?

g) Coin bank game



Train eye-hand coordination skills

⇒ **How to fasten with buttons**

How to have more fun?

- Let children make their own coin bank
- Based on children's abilities, use coin banks of different shapes or with different sizes of the hole
- Can ask children to match shapes and sizes

How to teach self-care skills?

h) Clothespin game



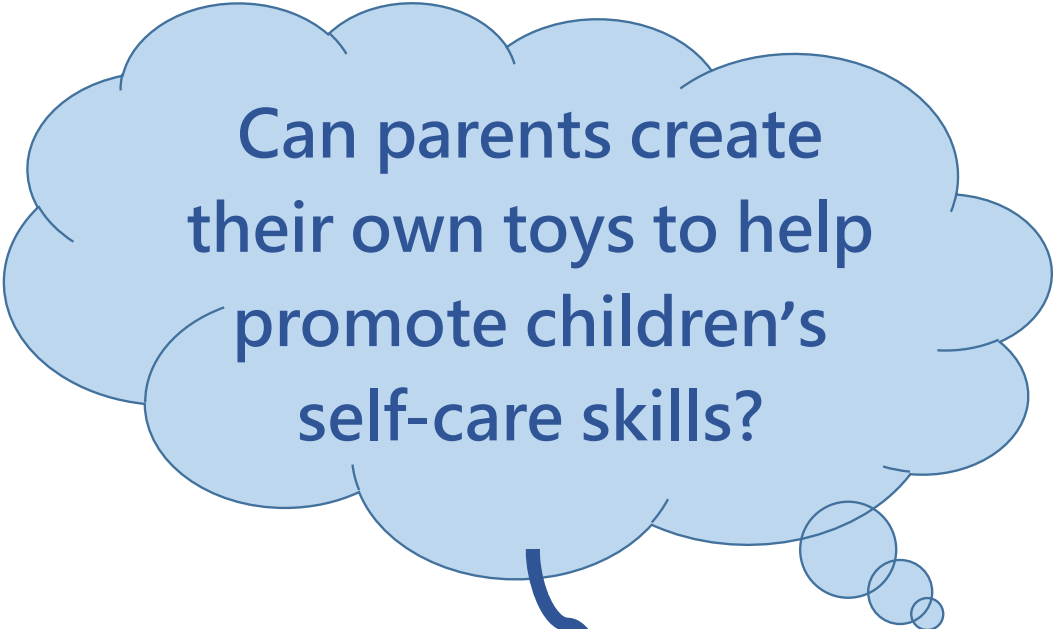
Train eye-hand coordination skills

⇒ How to use tools and control the amount of force used

How to have more fun?

- Let children make decisions (e.g., children determine the matching rules)
- Let children create their own pictures and make up a story

How to teach self-care skills?



Can parents create their own toys to help promote children's self-care skills?

Yes! Parents can ask children to help out during the making process!

Use materials around us –
Use recycled materials at home to make the toys!

Fill two needs –
Ask the child to help out (e.g., cutting paper, gluing things together, lacing a string through holes), as this can train the child's self-care skills!



Warm Reminders

(1)

Parents

Grandparents

School

Domestic
Helper



Different caregivers should communicate and collaborate well, so as to maintain consistent expectations and caregiving practices!

Inconsistent caregiving practices are bad for children's development:

- In some families, **one parent** is strict on the child, whereas the **other parent** is lenient. This would make the child difficult to understand the behavioural expectations of them, more incline to follow and rely on the lenient parent. This will hinder the child's self-care skill development.
- The love of **grandparents** for the child may spoil the child. Overindulging and overprotecting the child, helping the child to do everything, not pointing out the mistakes made by the child, and satisfying all kinds of needs raised the child – all these may hinder the self-care skill development of the child.
- Do not let the **domestic helper** help the child to do everything (e.g., feeding, picking things up, cleaning, tidying up, etc.).
- Understand and accept the tasks assigned by **teachers** for children. Help children accomplish these tasks, especially those involving training of soft skills.

(2)



Parents are the role models for young children.

— As parents, do you rely on others to take care of you ?

Concluding Message 1

Because of our love for children, we may be reluctant to let children go. However, for the betterment of our children, learn to let them go.

SELF CAPT

Less control; more listening, observing and scaffolding!

Concluding message 2



Do not underestimate
how complicated a
self-care skill can be.

Every self-care skill:

** Involves a series of steps*

** Is acquired through
repeated practice*

Concluding message 3



Do not underestimate the power of every word you say!

Increase children's motivation for self-care through your words!

Concluding Message 4

Consistent expectations and caregiving practices are crucial for children's development.

Consistency across time, places and people!



References

Heep Hong Society (2013a). *Development assessment chart*. Hong Kong: Heep Hong Society.

Heep Hong Society (2013b). *Developmental learning package – Curriculum guide*. Hong Kong: Heep Hong Society.