

Overview

Most people would agree that parenting is quite a challenge. While child rearing is fraught with difficulties, raising a child who is blind or visually impaired presents an additional set of unique challenges. Without timely intervention, a visual disability could affect the growth and development of your three- to six-year-old child. This course not only describes some of those special challenges, it also suggests ways to approach them. Familiarizing yourself with this information will enable you to create the type of home environment that fosters the skills your child needs to become a competent and independent individual.

This course addresses the universal needs of children between the ages of three and six. More important, it focuses on the distinct needs of a preschooler who is blind or visually impaired. Lesson 1 describes how your child learns by integrating sensory and motor skills. Lesson 2 explains how cognitive concepts develop. Lesson 3 explains the fundamental orientation and mobility skills that your child needs to

navigate competently and confidently through familiar environments. Lesson 4 focuses on age-appropriate personal-care skills. Lesson 5 describes how mealtime and food-related skills contribute to your child's learning. Lesson 6 discusses the various relationships that make up your child's social world. Lesson 7 identifies specific social skills that can enable your preschooler to interact socially, even if blindness or a visual impairment limits his or her ability to imitate others through observation.

To complete the course, you will need the materials that The Hadley School for the Blind has provided, as well as writing materials in the medium of your choice. If you are taking the audiocassette version of this course, you will also need your own tape recorder.

This course offers unique features, such as:

- Gender-specific sections, with the masculine and feminine subjects used alternately
- Boxed text to draw your attention to some particular aspect of the content

- An Activities Calendar filled with easy, everyday activities

Each lesson features self-directed activities followed by suggested approaches. Since these are for your personal development only, do not send your answers to your Hadley instructor. You are required, however, to submit the assignment at the end of each lesson.

As you complete each assignment, send it to your instructor at The Hadley School for the Blind, 700 Elm Street, Winnetka, IL 60093. If you are blind or visually impaired, you may send your assignments in envelopes labeled Free Matter for the Blind provided the assignments are in braille or large print (14 point or larger), on cassette or computer diskette. If you are sighted, however, your assignments require adequate postage. To fax your assignments or to send them electronically, contact your instructor for further instructions.

Lesson 5

Handling Food-Related Tasks

Lesson 1 focused on the integration of sensory and motor skills. Lesson 2 explained the development of cognitive skills. Lesson 3 described specific orientation and mobility techniques. Lesson 4 discussed the first category of daily living skills; that is, those that relate to personal care. This lesson addresses the second category of daily living skills—those that pertain to food.

Are your family meals often rushed? Perhaps so. They might also seem noisy, messy, and lacking in “quality” atmosphere from time to time. Regardless, recognize the importance of making the most of mealtime by putting to good use the various skills that your child is working on in other areas. Food-related tasks go beyond learning to eat with utensils. They offer natural opportunities for reinforcing skills in the areas of sensory, motor, cognitive, and O&M abilities. Keep a positive attitude in the face of all the large and small challenges of mealtime. Respect mealtime as a

significant event, full of potential for developing your child's independence.

This lesson explains how you can turn meals into learning opportunities. It describes effective eating techniques. It also suggests ways to engage your child in meal preparation and cleanup. Familiarizing yourself with this information will enable you to create the type of home environment that fosters the skills your child needs to become independent.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, you will be able to

- a. Use meals as learning opportunities
- b. Describe effective eating techniques
- c. Engage your child in meal preparation and cleanup

Using Mealtime to Learn

Basically, meals involve preparation, eating, and cleaning up. The sustenance as well as the social interaction that take place make mealtime an important event. This section highlights the importance of mealtime as a learning opportunity. It

offers tips on how your family can use consistency, creativity, common sense, and table manners to make the most of this time together.

Consistency

To begin with, try to follow the same schedule every day. Routine is particularly important when it comes to mealtime. Why? Because keeping mealtimes consistent and spaced far enough apart helps ensure that your preschooler is hungry. This, in turn, motivates her to work on her eating skills. For the same reason, limit the amount of snacks she has throughout the day; unless, of course, your doctor has suggested this practice. If you cannot always follow a rigid schedule, don't worry provided consistency prevails most of the time. If your child still doesn't seem to have an appetite after you've observed consistent mealtimes and cut down on her snacking, ask yourself if she's getting enough exercise. The solution may be as simple as helping her increase her daily level of physical activity, perhaps with regular visits to the playground or bouts of romping on the playroom floor.

Consistency also applies to where your family eats. If you have a dining room or kitchen table, insist on eating there. Eating on the couch or the floor in front of the TV is hardly a good idea, though a special pizza night watching a movie can be promised as a special treat once in a while. Eating at the table gives your child the best physical support and atmosphere for working on her eating skills. It puts her physically closer to the whole experience of mealtime, from preparation to cleanup. It helps give her the big picture. Provide your child with a stable, supportive chair. Make sure she's comfortable and in the proper position for eating, with her hips, knees, and ankles bent. Show her how to lean slightly forward so that her mouth is over her plate. If her feet cannot touch the floor, slide a stool or box underneath for support. This makes her feel more secure, as well as gives her the best positioning to practice her eating techniques.

Consistency applies to the words you use and how you do certain things. For example, let others who work with your child know what words you're using. Set the table in the same way so that she knows where things are. If your child has residual vision, be

consistent and help her achieve success by using contrast as much as possible; for instance, use dishes in colors that contrast with the tabletop and the food being served.

Creativity

Lesson 1 discussed tactile defensiveness, which is simply a resistance to certain physical sensations. Could this affect your child's eating as well? Could her poor appetite be traced to her resistance to touching certain types of foods? Perhaps your child dislikes having textured food in her mouth, such as rice or crunchy cereal.

Did You Know?

A natural protective response to unfamiliar sensations, tactile defensiveness, occurs in many young children, sighted or visually impaired. When you think about it, it's quite understandable. Imagine being handed a cold, wet slice of orange or having someone put a grainy cereal in your mouth when you have neither the visual input nor the appreciation of these foods. Would there really be an instant attraction?

The best way to help your child overcome her resistance to certain types of food is to progressively expose her to new and different textures and flavors. Try not to force an experience, however. That would only leave a bad taste in everyone's mouth, in more ways than one. On the other hand, don't accept it as the final word if she chokes or gags on a food or spits it out when you first introduce it to her. See that she gets a varied, nutritionally balanced diet. In time, gradually increase her tolerance for texture and flavors. For example, you might begin by adding a small amount of rice or crunchy cereal in with a smoother food she already likes. Then gradually increase the amount of the textured food. Patience

and gentle encouragement are generally all it takes to get your preschooler beyond her initial resistance.

When introducing a new food, talk about it first. Explain its origin and what it feels or tastes like (e.g., sweet or sour, hot or cold). Maybe you could compare it to another food your preschooler likes. Be as descriptive as possible when explaining what the food looks like; try to supply the enticement that she cannot notice from its visual appeal. For instance, mention how a new fruit has the same vibrant color as the red apples she likes so much. Develop her interest in and appreciation for different types of food. In the course of developing taste, every child runs across one or two items that she just doesn't like. Your child may continue to reject these, even after all kinds of encouragement. When this happens, do your best to honor her judgment and avoid serving these foods altogether. Quite often, you can use a substitute that provides similar nutrients. If you're concerned that this might compromise her nutrition, consult your pediatrician or a nutritionist for ideas.

Common Sense

As your child develops her eating skills, remember to expect mishaps and spills. The more you get upset, the more nervous she'll become about feeding herself. At the beginning, spread a drop cloth or some newspapers under her chair. If necessary, use a bib for your child and an apron for yourself. Then select unbreakable dishes, at least until her skills improve. Eventually she will use regular dishes like the rest of the family. The key is to be as relaxed and stress-free as possible during this important and enjoyable learning activity.

Initially, look for dishes that make eating easier, like plates that have sides to prevent food from spilling over. At this stage, you could serve your child's food in a bowl or on a plate with high, rounded sides to scoop against. It is also helpful to stabilize the dish. For example, place her dish on a piece of nonskid rubber or buy dishes with suction cups that keep them from moving around. These adaptations are available in toy stores or in catalogs that feature aids and appliances for independent living.

Avoid interruptions and distractions as much as possible. Let friends and relatives know what time you eat your meals so they won't drop by or call at those times. Minimize background noise, such as TV and radio. The calmer the atmosphere, the more conducive it is to developing eating skills. While you allow enough time for your child to practice her skills, don't let the meal drag on indefinitely. She might just be holding out and refusing to work on feeding herself because she knows that eventually mommy or daddy will give up and do all the work just so they can clear the table. Thirty minutes or so is usually quite adequate. Decide what you think is appropriate for your family and end the meal when that time is up by removing the food from the table.

Perhaps physical complications, such as oral motor problems, interfere with your child's appetite or eating skills. If so, an occupational therapist could help her overcome these difficulties. Your child will not eat adult-sized servings of food, however. Her body hardly needs as much as yours does. Very small portions are certainly more satisfying to both of you since she can finish what's on her plate. Remember

the importance of building in those opportunities for decision making and success! Your child can always ask for more if she's still hungry. In fact, being able to do so gives her an even greater opportunity to feel a sense of control, which leads to pride in herself. If at any time you are concerned that your child is not getting the calories she needs, consult your pediatrician or a nutritionist.

If your child still doesn't seem interested enough to work on her eating skills, take a second look at your approach.

- Do you need to move your meals further apart to allow her time to get hungry?
- Have you properly assessed whether or not she is ready to learn a certain skill?
- Have you broken the skill down into manageable steps?
- Are you concentrating on these steps one at a time, allowing for plenty of little successes?
- Are you giving lots of feedback and encouragement?

If one method of teaching a skill isn't working, try another technique. Above all, relax and do not let frustration get the better of you. Remember the importance of a positive attitude and enjoy the time with your child—especially mealtime.

Table Manners

Acceptable eating habits and good manners help your child fit in with family and friends, at home and when you eat out. If you haven't already, introduce basic table manners. Certainly, your lessons will carry more weight if you insist on standards of appropriate table behavior for all members of the household. Urge everyone to be polite and considerate of others, such as using "please" and "thank you" consistently. Even if your child routinely wears a bib, you could still teach her how to use a napkin properly. Remind her to keep her mouth closed when chewing her food. Likewise, introduce examples of consideration for others. For instance, when the bread rolls are passed, explain that she should take the first roll that she touches, rather than feel each one. Does your child realize there is a polite way to ask for assistance, like prefacing her request with "excuse me?" While all this

may sound like a lot of teaching to fit into 30 minutes or so, take it a few steps at a time. Surely you don't have to teach everything at once.

Up to now, your child may have used mostly her hands to explore the food on her plate. That's acceptable for a short while. As she becomes older and more skilled, however, encourage her to use a piece of bread to locate her food. Eventually, her movements will be better coordinated and will allow her to use that piece of bread to push the food onto the spoon or the fork. While her dexterity improves, use words that she understands to describe where the food is located on her plate. For now, such words as *top* and *bottom* as well as *right* and *left* may enable you to do just that. In time, you could also use the positions of the hands on a clock face. For example, help her locate the food by telling her that the meat is at the bottom of the plate, the potatoes are at the top, and the carrots are at the left. Later on, using the clock technique, describe how the chicken is at 6 o'clock, the rice at 2 o'clock, and the green beans at 10 o'clock.

Always keep in mind the unique social value of mealtime. Eating a meal with others is so much more than just getting physical nourishment. For this reason, include your child at the table during mealtime, even if you choose to feed her beforehand. The social significance of mealtime is one of the best reasons to keep things calm, allow enough time, and follow all the other guidelines suggested in this section to make teaching food skills more manageable. Mealtime is a wonderful opportunity for your family to share food, conversation, and togetherness.

Mealtime is an important part of the daily routine. This section explained how you can turn your meals into unique learning opportunities. Approaching mealtime with consistency, creativity, and common sense will enable your child to build on her existing abilities. Insisting on table manners also makes mealtime more conducive to learning. Mealtime is an important aspect of daily living skills. It offers countless opportunities for your child to practice her skills in all areas of learning.



Self-Directed Activity

Test your knowledge of the material in this section by completing this self-directed activity. Compare your answer with the text that follows. Do not send it to your instructor, however, as this activity is for your personal development only.

Are your mealtimes set up in such a way that you can make the most of them? Give at least two examples of how you could improve them so that they provide your child an added opportunity to learn.

Suggested Approach

Perhaps you decided to establish a more regular schedule and to limit snacking so that your child is hungry enough to eat. One parent may want to increase her child's exposure to new tastes and sensations by introducing an unfamiliar food item each month. Another could have decided to serve smaller portions so that her child experiences success. Doing so would also give the child the opportunity to ask for a second helping, which in a small way lets her practice decision-making skills.

Practicing Eating Techniques

As your preschooler matures, both of you will want him to perfect his eating techniques. This section suggests ways to encourage him to do just that. Whether your child is working on spoon handling, spearing, cutting, or drinking, follow the guidelines presented in this section to foster your child's independence.

Perhaps you've already observed your child's attempts at using utensils. Generally, children love to act grown-up, and you can use this to motivate your child to practice the correct way to use first the spoon, then the fork, and finally the knife.



Food for Thought!

Your child can use utensils pretty much as his sighted counterparts do. You may just have to take a different road in order to get him there.

Lack of dexterity, control, or flexibility can sometimes add to difficulties in managing utensils. Despite frustrations, encourage your child to persevere. Help him practice the movements until they become

automatic. Start with foods that are easy to handle so that he experiences success early on. Moreover, let him engage in other activities that strengthen arm muscles and promote fine motor skills. Exercises that require the arms to bear weight (like playing human wheelbarrow), to turn the wrist (like opening jars), and to manipulate objects (like opening doors with keys) are especially useful. He could also practice using utensils at times other than mealtime. For example, use Playdough to shape pretend foods; then have your child use his utensils to scoop, spear, and cut. Oftentimes, competent use of utensils takes more practice than you can give it during mealtime alone.

When you worked with your preschooler on his motor skills, you typically did so coactively, usually from behind. Use the same approach when he is learning to manipulate utensils. Position yourself behind him so that he feels the movements you are making. Doing so also offers reassuring body contact between the two of you. Encourage him to eat with one hand and to keep the other hand on the edge of the dish. The hand on the dish keeps it in place and serves as a reference point. At first, place your hands over his to

show him exactly how to manipulate the utensil. When he begins to get the hang of it, simply offer some support and guidance at the wrist, then at the elbow. Eventually, you can withdraw all support and let him practice on his own.

The Spoon and the Fork

Most preschool-age children can scoop with a spoon because it is the easiest utensil to start with. As with anything, however, many factors determine the timetable that is right for your child. So it is up to you to assess his abilities before deciding if he's ready to attempt this skill. You could also consult with the various specialists described earlier in the course. In particular, the occupational therapist can help you determine if your child needs utensils that are adapted in some way. Afterward, you would steadily review your child's progress, since the goal is to keep moving toward the use of regular utensils.

If your child is a novice at using a spoon, help him succeed by providing foods that are more likely to stay on the spoon, like mashed potatoes or macaroni and cheese. Likewise, cut other foods into small

enough pieces that are easy to scoop. Until his skills improve, he might use a two-hand technique with one hand locating the food and the other scooping it.

Gradually, have him use a piece of bread instead of his fingers to locate the food on his plate and to push it onto the spoon. Experience will enable your child to gauge the weight of the food on his spoon. Until then, let him use his free hand to check the amount of food on his spoon.



Did You Know?

Again, a good idea is to start teaching the last steps of a task. Apply this principle to eating with a spoon and teach the steps in a backward sequence, such as

11. Chew and swallow the food
10. Return the spoon to the plate.
9. Slide the spoon out.
8. Close the mouth over the food.
7. Insert the food.
6. Open the mouth.
5. Raise the spoon to the mouth.
4. Scoop the food.
3. Position the spoon over the food.
2. Grasp the spoon handle.
1. Locate the spoon on the table.

Once your child is adept at using a spoon, introduce him to the fork. Again, work with him from behind. Show him how the fork can be used either to spear food or scoop it, much like a spoon. At first, he might enjoy spearing food with a somewhat dramatic stabbing movement. This typically does not last, and he will soon use a more sedate, smoother motion. Just as your child first used a two-handed method when eating with the spoon, he may use one hand to

locate the food and the other to spear it.

Nevertheless, encourage him to use a piece of bread to act as a pusher. From there on, using the fork is simply a matter of practice, just like using other tools. You'll lessen your child's frustration by giving him as much verbal direction and encouragement as possible, for as long as he needs it.

The Knife

Once your child has become comfortable using the spoon and fork, introduce the knife. Especially at the beginning, let him manipulate a child-size knife to butter his bread or roll. Then let him experiment with food that is easy to cut, such as well-cooked vegetables or ground meat. Sit or stand behind him and take him through the motions of using the knife, explaining what is happening. Walk him through the various steps as many times as necessary. Begin with the hand-over-hand or hand-under-hand technique, and gradually move your hands back to offer guidance and support at the wrists, then the elbows.

Examine the many aspects of a task before you begin teaching it. For instance, consider the steps involved

in spreading butter on a piece of bread. In the beginning, your child might have to practice holding the slice of bread in a certain way. He may also have to practice positioning and moving the knife blade to spread rather than cut. Your child would also need to practice placing the butter pat on the center of the slice, then moving it outward with the knife in all directions in order to spread evenly. Needless to say, teaching even the most mundane task involves careful preparation. Once you've analyzed the many steps that make up a task, teach a few at a time and don't hesitate to review your approach if your child seems to become overly frustrated.



Did You Know?

Cutting with the knife requires repeated practice sessions. When you think your child is ready, let him follow these steps to cut his meat:

1. Grasp the fork for spearing with the nondominant hand.
2. Grasp the knife with the dominant hand.
3. Locate the edge of the food with the knife.
4. Hold the fork with the tines pressed on the food.
5. Insert the edge of the tines near the point of cutting.
6. Hold the knife with the cutting edge of the blade placed against the food.
7. Place the cutting edge of the knife blade close to the fork tines.
8. With a sawing motion, cut using enough pressure to sever a piece.
9. Pick up the severed portion by spearing with the fork while using the knife to hold back the food.
10. Use the fork to bring up the food to the mouth.

Cutting skills require plenty of patience and encouragement on your part. While your child

practices his techniques, try to make things easier. For example, cut the food that is harder to handle and let him practice on cooked vegetables or a piece of cheese. He could also practice using a knife at other times, like when he is cutting chunks of modeling clay.

As added motivation, why not make up a song or a riddle about the motions used in manipulating utensils, whether he is scooping, spearing, spreading, or cutting? Look for spoons, forks, and knives that amuse him, perhaps with brightly colored or musical handles. These skills take time to acquire.

Nonetheless, they make it easier for him to fit in with family and peers. Of course, your goal is to have your child use regular utensils, if and when he is able to do so. Until then, use fun and motivating tools and techniques to keep him practicing and learning.

Drinking and Pouring

Learning eating techniques does not necessarily follow a rigid pattern. For most children, learning to use utensils, pour liquids, and drink from a cup happens somewhat concurrently. Only you can judge how much teaching and learning your child can

manage. It's pointless to try to teach too many skills at once if your child does not enjoy himself. Therefore, set your own guidelines depending on your child's needs and readiness for certain tasks.

Special kinds of cups help make practice easier and more fun for your preschooler if he has not yet mastered drinking from one. Some play music when they're picked up; others change color when you pour cold liquids into them. Certain training cups have special tops that prevent spills or weighted bottoms that keep them from tipping over. Until your child improves his drinking skills, especially if he starts using a regular cup or glass, make the job easier and prevent spills by filling it only halfway. When your child is learning to drink from a cup or glass, let him find it at its place on the table or other surface. Urge other family members and teachers to do the same. Remember the Fairy Godmother Syndrome! If you always hand your preschooler the cup or glass, it seems to come from midair. Wouldn't he then try to return it to the "invisible shelf?" Though logical, this response would be of little comfort to the person cleaning up the spill.

Once you feel your child is ready, teach him to pour liquids even if this seems quite a challenge at first. Pouring gives great practice in coordination and motor skills, not to mention a great feeling of accomplishment, so it is more than worth the effort. Usually, you introduce this activity once your child has become comfortable with drinking from a cup or glass. Or spend some time observing him beforehand, perhaps when he plays in the water or the sandbox; then decide when to introduce this skill in the kitchen.

If your child has residual vision, let contrast make the task of pouring easier. For example, why not have him pour milk into a dark cup? Pouring liquids lets your child use his sense of touch. First have him wash his hands. Next show him where to set the cup or glass, such as on a tray that can catch spills.

Demonstrate how to put his finger over the edge of the glass so that it extends a little into the glass. At the beginning, it may be best if you do the pouring. Have your child say "Stop" when he feels the liquid touching his finger. Let him practice until he actually feels the wetness with his finger, rather than merely

guessing based on elapsed time or the sound of the liquid going into the glass.

Once he has mastered this technique, teach him to do the pouring himself using a small pitcher. Place his hand on the handle of the pitcher and place your hand over his to guide him as he pours. Describe what is happening. Again, have him stop when his fingertip gets wet. Go through this exercise a few times, and ask him to explain what is happening to ensure that he understands. Finally, your preschooler could be ready to pour by himself. Filling glasses for the family can soon become one of his special mealtime duties.

This section described certain eating techniques that your preschooler may be ready to tackle. There are so many opportunities during the day when your child can acquire these skills, during both mealtime and playtime. Your support and encouragement will go a long way in allowing him to master using utensils competently, as well as perfecting his drinking and pouring techniques.



Self-Directed Activity

Test your knowledge of the material in this section by completing this self-directed activity. Then compare your answers with the text that follows.

Peruse the Activities Calendar. Select one activity that would help your child practice his eating techniques. How would this activity help your child refine his eating skills? How could you modify this activity to make it more fun?

Suggested Approach

You may have chosen to do an activity from the month of January, like “Compare *empty* and *full*.” This activity involves filling cups, bowls, and bottles with perhaps cereal, water, and pieces of fruit. No doubt, it would enable your child to practice his pouring skills. At the same time, he could practice using a spoon to measure ingredients, and a fork to spear pieces of watermelon that he will have to cut with a knife.

There are many ways to modify this activity. For example, you could use similar skills for other activities, such as gardening, whereby your child uses

a spoon to measure plant food and his knife to cut a small branch. Think of all the pouring practice he gets when he waters his plants every week.

Preparing Meals and Cleaning Up

Meals involve much more than the time spent at the table eating the food. Don't let your child miss out on the valuable experiences of helping with preparation and cleanup. Just as you stress an "I can do it" attitude in other areas, welcome her active participation in food-related tasks. This helps her work on many skills; it also makes her feel more a part of the family. That alone is an invaluable payoff.

Moreover, like other household responsibilities, kitchen chores offer your child other benefits that lead to greater independence. That is because meal preparation and cleanup offer countless options for helping her increase her sensory, motor, and cognitive skills. As an added bonus, children are often more willing to taste new foods when they've helped pick them out or prepare them.

Grocery shopping is a wonderful way to stimulate your child's interest in different foods. Taking her

along at a time when she is fresh and alert could make the trip more successful. Even before you get to the store, however, get her involved in meal preparation. For example, welcome her input when deciding your weekly menu and preparing the shopping list. She can participate at the store as well. For instance, when you go through the produce section, let her count the apples that go in the bag. Ask her questions about how the oranges feel and smell. In the cereal aisle, ask her to decide which kind she wants. Unless you are dealing with breakable containers, boost her confidence by allowing her to place items in the shopping basket. All along, describe the types of food you see on the shelves as you walk from aisle to aisle. Before long, your child increases her knowledge of foods and might do most of the talking, even convincing you to serve spaghetti for dinner instead of fish. Grocery shopping helps your child use all her senses to integrate the information they give her. It gives her a chance to use her decision-making and problem-solving skills. Hopefully, her participation in the shopping aspect of mealtime will also promote her interest in the foods she eats.

Involve your child in the whole mealtime process and apply some of the suggestions this lesson offers. In addition to choosing activities that are age-appropriate, you can sometimes modify and monitor others to make them fun and safe. Before long, you'll be able to incorporate your own ideas. Most activities give your child opportunities to work on various skills concurrently.



Food for Thought!

Do you remember the cognitive concept of object constancy explained in Lesson 2? Apply this knowledge to the foods you prepare. For example, let her feel and taste raw potatoes; then have her compare this to the feel and taste of cooked potatoes. The same principle could apply to making pudding, freezing ice cubes, and popping popcorn.

Being involved in the meal from start to finish helps your preschooler understand the big picture of mealtime. Once she realizes where the foods come from and how they get to the table, why not also teach her where everything goes when the meal is over?

Your child can help with some of the cleanup; for instance, she could

- Use a tray to carry her plate, cup, and utensils to the counter
- Remove some items from the table, like the bread basket or the salt and pepper shakers
- Wet a towel, then wipe the table using a gridline pattern
- Push the chairs under the table
- Load dirty utensils in the dishwasher
- Unload clean utensils from the dishwasher and put them away

Do you realize how many skills your child practices just by doing these simple tasks? For instance, wetting a towel to wipe the table lets her practice her motor skills when she uses the faucet to turn on the water, then wrings out the towel. It reinforces the concept of object constancy when she realizes that, though it feels different, the wet or dry dishcloth is one and the same. Of course, once she is done wiping the table, she can practice washing her hands. Can you see how nicely everything overlaps, and how all areas of learning reinforce each other?

Mealtime alone gives your child lots of opportunities to be successful in the tasks she undertakes. For instance, let her

- Put the bread in the toaster
- Pour her own cereal and milk using a measuring cup to get just the right amount
- Break the egg she wants for breakfast
- Spread peanut butter on a celery stick at snack time
- Insert the straw in her juice box
- Count rolls for dinner
- Bring the bread basket to the table
- Pour a cup of chocolate chips into the cookie dough
- Open the box that contains the pudding mix
- Cut up pieces of fruit to make a fruit salad

Your preschooler can handle so many simple chores. Do you own a dog or a cat? If so, let her assume some responsibility for making sure it is fed on time. Once she knows when and how to pour the food, teach her how to fill the water bowl. She can help with other household tasks as well, like emptying

wastebaskets once a week or putting away clean utensils when you empty the dishwasher.

Letting your child help around the house not only develops her daily living skills, it also helps her practice her other skills. Consider the various concepts and techniques that your child works on by performing a certain task. For example, setting the table involves making sure that each family member has the right placement for the fork, spoon, and knife, thus reinforcing spatial orientation, categorization, matching, and one-to-one correspondence.

Reconsider the location of your everyday dishes and utensils to allow her increased independence. Why not store plates, utensils, and glassware in a bottom cupboard, as close to the table as possible? This simple modification enables her to retrieve everything that she needs to set the table without any assistance from you.

Your child can learn so much from getting involved in food preparation and cleanup. Not only do these activities enable her to assume some basic responsibilities, they offer opportunities for her to work

on skills in other areas. This section let you see the invaluable learning that takes place while she engages in such activities.



Self-Directed Activity

Test your knowledge of the material in this section by completing this self-directed activity. Then compare your answers with the text that follows.

The next time you prepare dinner, list some of the chores involved in preparing the meal and cleaning up afterward. Name two tasks that your child could take on so that she participates in the overall meal process. Identify at least two specific skills that she would be working on while accomplishing these tasks.

Suggested Approach

Perhaps your child helped you draw up a grocery list by checking whether or not the ingredients were in the pantry. You might also have let her cut up the cucumber that goes into the salad. These two tasks enabled your child to practice a number of skills, among others:

- The concept of categorization as you let her explain how best to organize the shopping list
- The use of positional concepts as you tell her that the vinegar is next to the oil bottle on the bottom shelf of the cupboard
- The sense of touch as she felt if the cucumber was fresh and firm
- The use of the knife to cut cucumber slices

This is just one example of how everyday tasks let your child add to her existing store of knowledge. You don't always have to stop and analyze everything you or your child does, however. Take comfort in knowing that most activities that your child engages in can give her plenty of practice in refining her skills, if you just let her.

Summary

Food-related chores, along with personal-care tasks, make up the daily living skills that foster your preschooler's independence. This section discussed mealtime as a learning opportunity. Because preparing food, eating, and cleaning up after meals are often social events, these skills represent so

much more than just means to physical sustenance. They can bring a great deal of meaning to your child's life.

Assignment 5



Complete the following assignment in the medium of your choice. Begin by including your full name, student ID, address, and phone number. Also mention the name of this course, Assignment 5, your instructor's name, and the date you plan to send this assignment.

As suggested in this lesson, mealtime offers countless learning opportunities. This assignment requires that you involve your child in planning a family meal. This could be a simple breakfast or a picnic for the two of you. Identify at least five skills that your child worked on as you describe how he participated in preparing and eating the meal, as well as cleaning up afterward. Limit your answer to three print pages or a three-minute recording.

Once you have completed this assignment, mail, fax, or e-mail it to your instructor. Then proceed to Lesson 6: Developing Relationships.