






How to Teach a Skill

Sometimes kids have trouble with certain things because they don't have the skills they need to be successful. Lots of new skills can be taught with the right approach. You have already taught your children many things, often without realising it.

Common areas for skill development include:

What?	Looks like	
Fine Motor skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (small movements with hands), eg. poking dough with a finger, stacking blocks, cutting with scissors, doing up buttons, tying shoelaces. 	
Gross Motor skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (big muscle/movement), eg. crawling, standing, jumping on a trampoline, riding a bike. 	
Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eg. back and forth communication, which can be with sounds or words, understanding what is being said, understanding other people's 'body language' 	
Social Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eg. playing with another child, sharing a toy, taking turns, being aware of the needs of others 	
Self-help skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eg. feeding, dressing, toileting and for older kids helping with household tasks. 	




What?	Looks like	
Behaviour skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eg. keeping calm when things go wrong, persevering when things are hard, coping with change, coping with not getting your own way etc. 	
Cognitive skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eg. pointing to pictures in a book, counting, re-telling a story, solving problems 	
Play skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eg. simple play (putting things in and out of a container) complex play (with many steps in the play sequence), pretend or role play. 	

Steps to Success

What/How?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think about what the end point will be – this will be your long-term goal. 	
What/How?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start by finding out what your child can already do easily, without any help. This is the point to start teaching from. 	
What/How?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work out what the next step in the skill is, this will be your short-term goal, eg. if a child can crawl, but isn't yet pulling themselves to stand, the long-term goal might be 'to walk independently' but the short-term goal might be 'to pull self to stand' and then 'to walk while holding on to something'. 	



What/How?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When there are several steps, or a sequence, to a skill, e.g., brushing your teeth or making a bed, decide if your child is going to start with the first step (putting on the toothpaste) or the last step (putting the pillow on the bed neatly) 		
What/How?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice, Practice, Practice – but keep it short and sweet. Stop when the child is getting tired or isn't enjoying themselves. Short, frequent, fun times practicing will build a new pathway in your child's brain more quickly than practicing for an hour once a week. 		
Think Outside the Square		
What?	How?	
What is your child interested in and good at?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use these to help your child feel good about/want to learn a new skill. For example, if a child loves looking at themselves in the mirror, teach brushing of teeth in front of a mirror. If a child loves trains and you want them to practice counting, give them trains to count. 	
What?	How?	
How your child learns (their learning profile).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it by looking? By doing? By listening? By moving? Use their 'learning profile' to make sure teaching/learning is easier e.g. a child who learns through moving will develop their drawing/writing skills more easily if they are not sitting at a table but are making marks with pavement chalk on your driveway so they can easily move and draw. 	
What?	How?	
What sensory input will help your child learn more easily.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do they need a quiet place to learn? Would music playing in the background help or get in the way of them focusing? Do they need a movement break to help with focus? Do they need a squeeze hug to get them calm before they practice a skill? 	
What?	How?	
Think about how to make it fun.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If it isn't fun, kids won't want to practice or learn. Can the skill be taught through play/a game/singing/while jumping on the trampoline? 	
What?	How?	

<p>How can you fit the skill practice into your life, so it doesn't feel like a chore for you or your child?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example, giving your child a jug and some containers in the bath means they will tip and pour and by doing so they will be developing their fine motor skills and the skill of being able to pour themselves a drink – but it doesn't feel like work, it is fun. 	
--	--	---

Some extra tips

- Use photos or video footage to show the child what they need to do or show them first and then get them to have a go.
- Follow any step that requires effort with something that is easy and fun.
- Work out what will motivate your child to try hard for example do they love to see you looking excited? A high five? A sticker? A fun activity afterwards?
- If your child is very resistant, think about whether they are ready for teaching this particular skill. Maybe you need to wait a while and build other strengths?
- Kids who spend a lot of time on screens, which are highly entertaining but require no effort, often don't develop the ability to try hard. Sometimes the starting point is reducing how much time they spend on screens.
- When teaching a skill, it is important to check that the child can use the skills in a variety of places, or with many people, not just in one setting with one person. This is called 'generalising' a skill.
- When teaching skills, it is important to check that the skill has meaning, eg. we can teach kids to say/sign 'hello' but if they don't do so with meaning they won't know when or who to say/sign hello to, which means the skill is not actually useful.