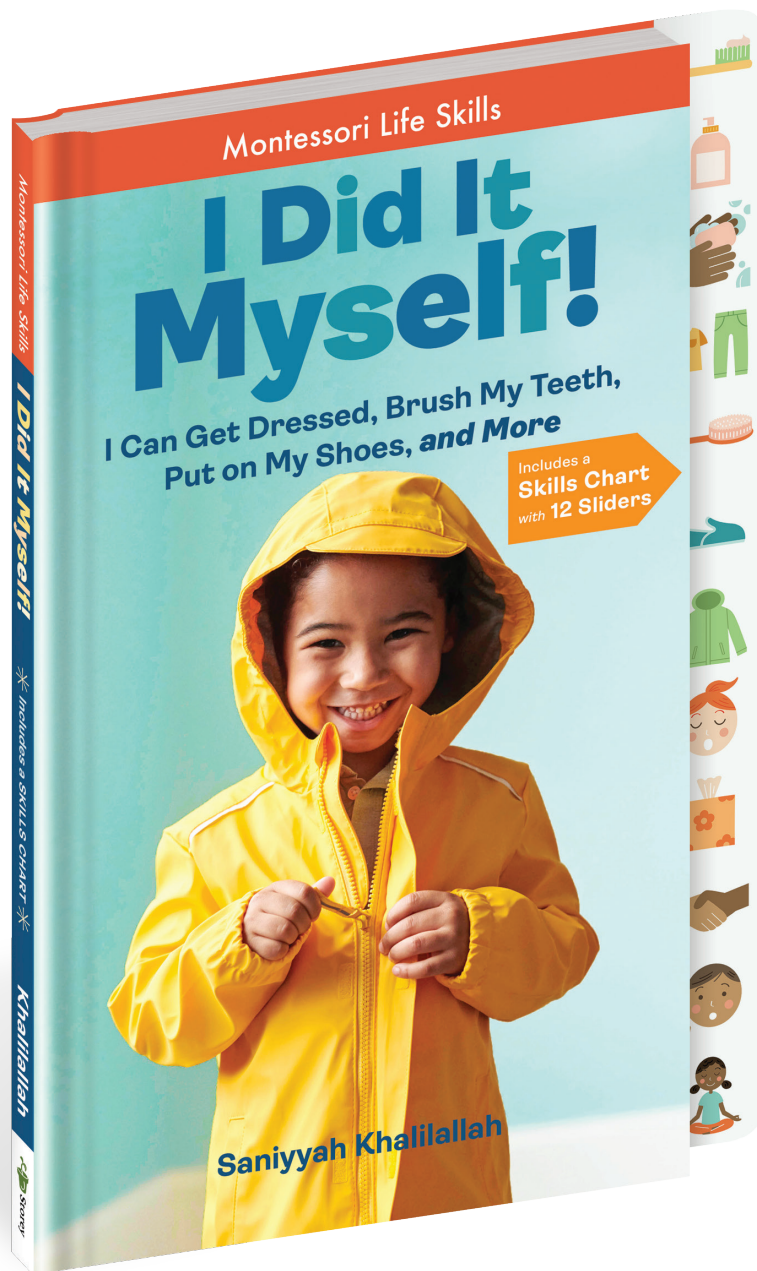




Guide for Grown-Ups



Look for *I Did It Myself!* wherever books are sold.





Tips to Help Children Be Successful

with the Activities in *I Did It Myself!*



The activities in *I Did It Myself!* are adapted from traditional Montessori lessons that I have used in my classroom for more than 10 years. Each activity gives the child an opportunity to learn and/or practice new skills. Through these activities children will develop things such as concentration and hand-eye coordination that they will be able to use in their day-to-day life. In addition, several of the skills will be part of the child's foundation for future learning and activities, both inside the classroom and in the outside world.



As the child navigates these activities and begins learning the associated skills, it will be more helpful for you to demonstrate the correct way of doing something than to point out when the child makes a mistake. Imagine how you would feel if, after completing a challenging task, someone told you that you had done it wrong. That's how a child feels when we point out, for example, that they have put their right shoe on the left foot and vice versa.



The main goal of all the dressing-related activities in *I Did It Myself!* is for the child to independently put on their clothes, shoes, and coat successfully. With that in mind, try to remember that children learn in isolated situations. Focusing on one lesson at a time (for example, simply putting the shoe on the foot) will help the child be more successful. If the child is uncomfortable while walking with the right shoe on the left foot and vice versa, they may be able to figure out what is amiss and correct the problem independently.

This not only gives the child an opportunity to practice problem-solving skills but also helps build the child's confidence. Making mistakes is part of growing and learning, and when the child is used to solving problems independently, they will be more prepared to navigate future challenges in school and beyond. By allowing mistakes to guide the child, you will help the child develop these important life skills.

In the pages that follow, I have suggested ways that you can help ensure the child's short-term success with each activity. The Indirect Benefits sections explain how each part of an activity helps set up the child for success with other lessons and skills down the road.



Brushing My Teeth

- This activity can be messy the first couple times the child handles the toothpaste. Be very exaggerated with how little toothpaste the child needs to prevent them from getting excess paste on the toothbrush or sink. Have towels accessible for the child to clean up a mess when it does happen.
- Instead of having the child use a cup, you can teach them how to shape one hand like a cup to rinse out their mouth.
- Have the child use a timer (set for 1 or 2 minutes) to help self-regulate how long they spend brushing their teeth.

Indirect Benefits

- This activity helps develop the child's independence, since getting ready for bed or getting ready in the morning will be their responsibility.
- Squeezing the toothpaste onto the toothbrush exercises fine motor skills, while the motion of brushing strengthens gross motor skills.
- Working to squeeze the right amount of toothpaste on the toothbrush requires the child to focus and concentrate.
- The child should clean up any mess they make while brushing their teeth. Not only will this further develop their independence and show consideration for others, but it will also give them an understanding of sequential steps because they will learn that brushing teeth is complete when there is no more mess around the sink.





Applying Lotion

- This activity can get messy, so be prepared! Have a towel accessible to the child in case they need to clean up excess lotion.
- Show the child how little lotion they will need by being very dramatic about the small dot of lotion that they'll put on one hand. If they put too much lotion on their body, have them wipe off the excess with a towel.
- Explain the steps of the activity to the child based on whether your bottle of lotion has a pump or needs to be squeezed.
- Pay attention to how the child handles the bottle. If the child will do better with pumping than squeezing, transfer the lotion to a smaller bottle that pumps. Likewise, if the child can squeeze more readily than pump, transfer the lotion to a smaller squeeze container.
- Have the child look in a mirror so they can see where they are applying lotion.
- Teach the child to rub the lotion in so there is no residue left on their skin.
- If the child is going outside, have them practice the same activity with sunscreen instead of moisturizing lotion. Keep in mind, though, that if using a sunscreen spray, you should alter the instructions slightly, since putting a small dot of lotion into their hands will be unnecessary.

Indirect Benefits

- Squeezing or pumping the lotion from the bottle exercises the child's fine motor skills.
- Making sure each body part has lotion helps the child develop concentration.
- Learning to apply lotion after drying off from the bath gives the child a sense of order and routine and teaches them about sequential steps.





Washing My Hands

- When a child is working with water, there will almost certainly be a mess. The key is to have clean-up materials such as extra towels accessible to the child. This allows the child to be independent and, because the adult is not responsible for the cleaning, helps them become more conscious of not spilling water.
- Use a large basin for this activity if you'd like. If you do, make sure to use a waterproof table or line the surface with a waterproof material. In addition, have the child use a pitcher to get water from the sink.
- The steps in the activity include using bar soap but liquid soap is also an option. Be mindful that pumping liquid soap can be a fun point of interest for the child, leading to excess soap usage or a soapy mess on the sink. In addition to emphasizing that the child should use only one pump of soap at a time, you can also dilute liquid soap to make it last longer. Because some bottles are difficult for the child to pump, it's best to test the bottle with the child beforehand to ensure their success.
- Show the child how to wash every part of their hands, including in between the fingers, the backs of the hands, and the palms.
- Children enjoy working with water, so be sure to teach the importance of turning off the water when it is not in use.
- If you notice the child concentrating while the water is running, switch to the basin method. The child will be able to splash in the basin water as long as they want or need to. To keep the child's interest, you can also change the soap every so often.
- Using a timer is a great option to make sure the child is washing their hands long enough to really get them clean, at least 20 seconds. The child can also sing certain songs (such as "Happy Birthday" two times) that will amount to 20 seconds.

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Washing My Hands *continued*



- A step stool is a great tool for children who cannot reach the sink on their own. Have the stool accessible to the child at all times, storing it in a place where the child can reach it and put it away.

Indirect Benefits

- Hand washing builds the child's concentration and independence—and, as a result, sense of pride. The child will be proud to know that they can fight germs independently.
- To successfully complete this activity the child must learn the importance of sequential steps: If the child puts soap on their hands before wetting their hands, there will be no bubbles. The mistake will be obvious for the child, who will expect the soap to create bubbles, and they can correct the missed step by wetting their hands. In this way the activity naturally introduces the child to basic problem-solving skills.





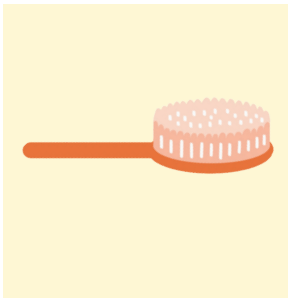
Getting Dressed

- Give the child two or three options for each article of clothing. Keep the clothes accessible to the child, storing them either on a low shelf or in a small closet. If you notice the child is overwhelmed with the options, reduce the amount of clothing in the child's closet.
- Make sure the child is able to independently put on all the clothes that are available to them. This will prevent frustration and negative self-esteem when trying to get dressed. For example, only offer a button-up shirt as an option if the child can successfully button the buttons.
- It will be easier for the child to put on pants while sitting down. This prevents them from also having to concentrate on balancing while trying to get dressed. Make sure there is a clean surface—such as a low chair, an area on the floor, or a towel spread out on the floor—where the child can sit.

Indirect Benefits

- Knowing that the clothes they are wearing are the result of a task they accomplished earlier in the day gives the child pride in their outfit and develops independence and self-confidence.
- Gripping the clothes develops the child's fine motor skills, and the movement of actually putting on the clothes develops gross motor skills.





Brushing or Combing My Hair

- In the bathroom keep a small basket with a brush or comb and spray bottle accessible to the child. Make sure there is also a mirror where the child can see themselves. **Note:** A wide-toothed comb or pick will be the best option to successfully detangle tightly textured hair. An oil-based spray or a detangler can also help the child succeed.
- Show the child how to start combing or brushing from the bottom tips of the hair, and gradually move up toward the roots while always pulling the brush *downward* or picking the comb *outward*.
- Allow the child to get creative and explore new hairstyles! Add hair products, hair ties, and/or bows to help the child build up more independence.
- Extend this activity, if you desire, by teaching the child how to clean out the brush or comb or by explaining the different parts of the brush or comb.

Indirect Benefits

- Styling your own hair gives you freedom to express who you are as a person. As a result, this activity promotes the child's independence, which helps them gain confidence.
- Holding the brush or comb strengthens the child's fine motor skills, while moving the brush or comb through the hair exercises gross motor skills.
- If the child does not brush beginning at the bottom tips of the hair, it will be more difficult to get out any knots. As the child understands that, they will be able to correct their mistake and learn about sequences.





Putting on My Socks and Shoes

- Sometimes it is easier for the child to scrunch the sock completely, pulling the toe of the sock up toward the opening. The sock will cover only the toes at first, and then the child can pull the sock up over the heel and toward the ankle.
- If the child is not ready to tie a bow yet, make sure the shoes available to put on independently are slip-ons or have Velcro closures. This will prevent the child from becoming frustrated during the activity.
- If you notice the child having a difficult time sliding their foot into the shoe, a shoehorn might help. This will require a lesson from an adult on how to use the shoehorn. (It may seem unlikely that a young child would be able to maneuver a shoehorn, but they often can. Many children find that the hardest part of putting on shoes is holding onto the back of the shoe while at the same time sliding the shoe onto the foot. The shoehorn lets the child focus on the motion of sliding their foot forward.)
- It is completely normal for a young child to put their shoes on the wrong foot! If you notice that the child has done so, try asking, “How do your feet feel in your shoes?” If the child responds, “Good!” then the child is comfortable, which is great. But if the child says they are uncomfortable, gently explain that switching the shoes might help. Then come up with ways to help the child remember on their own which shoe goes on which foot. If the child has a medical reason why their shoes must be worn on the correct feet, use an indicator like that shown at left so the child can be independent with this activity.



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Putting on My Socks and Shoes *continued*



Indirect Benefits

- The act of pulling the sock open exercises fine motor skills, while pulling the sock over the foot strengthens gross motor skills.
- Picking out socks, even if they are mismatched, allows the child to express themselves, which helps boost their confidence. Allow your child's personality to come out while getting dressed!
- As the child picks out socks to wear for the day, you can discuss different fabrics and textures. You can also explain why thicker and longer socks are usually worn during cold weather and that generally people do not wear socks with sandals. Researching what people wear on their feet around the world could be a fun cultural lesson for the child.
- The steps of putting on socks before shoes gives the child a chance to practice sequencing, which is necessary to do certain kinds of mathematics and builds executive functioning skills.





**How to
turn a
sleeve right
side out:**



Putting on My Coat

- Have the child practice working a zipper by laying their coat flat on a table, then having them use two hands to zip the zipper. Because zipping a coat on a table surface has the child working from a different angle than zipping the coat on the child's body, the child will need to transition to maneuvering the zipper on their body. Have them practice by using a small chair as a frame for the coat. This gives the child a stand or support for the jacket when zipping the zipper.
- You can also have the child practice buttoning, snapping, or tying clothes using the same technique described above.
- It will take a little practice for the child to understand where on the floor to place the coat for the flip to be successful. Show the child that when the coat is on the floor, the tag should be close to their body.
- If the child's coat is inside out, they will have to correct it to make this activity successful. Show the child how to put one arm through the sleeve, grip the end of the sleeve, and pull the sleeve out, without letting go, as shown at left.

Indirect Benefits

- The child exercises their fine motor skills while pinching the zipper and strengthens their gross motor skills by pulling the zipper up.
- The child builds concentration by focusing on putting the zipper in the slot and pulling up the zipper tab.
- When the child puts on their coat by themselves, they gain independence and a sense of pride that they are getting ready with zero help!





How to Cough, Sneeze, or Yawn

- This motion will take a little practice from the child. To help, you should use the same technique when you cough, sneeze, or yawn. The more it is modeled for the child, the more the child will use the motion.
- Emphasize the importance of each person keeping their germs to themselves and not spreading them to anyone else.
- If you notice the child not coughing, sneezing, or yawning into their elbow, you can gently ask them if they remember how to bend their elbow. This should help to remind the child what they should be doing without scolding or correcting them. If the child does not remember how to bend their elbow, take the time to show them how to safely sneeze, cough, or yawn.

Indirect Benefits

- When the child learns how to correctly cough, sneeze, or yawn into their elbow, they gain independence and learn to be aware of their surroundings and to be careful around others.
- A discussion about germs and how quickly they can be transferred may lead the child to ask many questions—and maybe even do some research!
- Learning that a yawn usually occurs when someone is tired introduces the child to self-regulation. A spontaneous nap may even happen!





Blowing My Nose

- You don't need to set up this activity ahead of time, but do show the child where the tissues are located and where the child can use a mirror. Placing a step stool near the mirror will also eliminate the need to set up a formal nose-blowing station.
- Often children are interested in pulling multiple tissues out of the box, so make sure to emphasize using only one tissue at a time.
- It is common for a young child to breathe *in* when you tell them to blow their nose. Explain to the child what "blowing out" means and show them, in a very exaggerated way, how to blow air *from* the nose.

Indirect Benefits

- Learning to blow their nose will not only help the child become independent but also will exercise their motor skills. Pulling a tissue from the box between two fingers and removing the excess mucus with two hands both exercise fine motor skills.
- A discussion about allergies and other reasons why mucus may build up in the nose—such as eating spicy food or crying tears of joy—could spark an educational conversation.





Meeting Someone New

- This activity requires practice. Model for the child the exact wording you would like them to use. Keep in mind, though, that unexpected scenarios may come up. For example, if the child didn't hear the other person's name, they may not know what to do. You can use that moment to model saying, "Excuse me?"
- If the child is from a culture where direct eye contact is considered rude or aggressive, or if the child is autistic and eye contact makes them very uncomfortable, practice other strategies that can show the person they are paying attention while still respecting the child's boundaries. One example is to have the child look at the other person's neck instead of into their eyes.
- After the introduction, especially if the child shakes hands, have them practice washing their hands (page 8 in the book) to stay safe and prevent the spread of germs.

Indirect Benefits

- Knowing how to meet someone politely gives the child confidence to introduce themselves to new people. This will help them to break the ice in some situations.
- Greeting someone and introducing themselves are skills that the child will use for their lifetime.
- This activity also helps develop the child's language skills. Using words to introduce themselves not only helps the child learn new words, it also lets them practice how to have a respectful conversation.





Excusing Myself

- Have a discussion with the child about the importance of showing respect and being polite to help them understand why they should learn this skill.
- Practicing this activity frequently will make it more likely that the child will remember to do it when a guest is present, so give the child plenty of opportunities to excuse themselves around the house. If you save this activity for when there are guests, it may not become natural for the child.

Indirect Benefits

- Teaching a young child how to excuse themselves respectfully provides them with an important lifelong skill. By mastering this activity, the child will have confidence knowing they can politely leave a situation that makes them uncomfortable. The child gains the ability to listen to their own body and self-regulate if they decide leaving the room is the best option.
- In addition, it might be easier for the child to try new things if they know there is an option to leave if necessary.
- The language the child uses in this activity could be new to them. This is a great way to introduce new words and sentences to the child.





Quiet Time

- This activity takes practice and consistency from both the adult and the child. Establish a “quiet time routine” to help the child remember the sequence.
- If you want to set a timer for the quiet time, start with 10 seconds. If the child stays quiet the full time, you can extend the silent period. Stop the timer once the child makes a noise. This teaches the child that quiet time is over as soon as they make a noise. To make this a completely independent activity, have the child use a sand timer to regulate their own quiet time.
- If the child has a hard time keeping silent, suggest that they squeeze their knees tightly. This gives the child something to focus on and is especially helpful for children who need intense sensory input to stay calm and relaxed.
- Closing the eyes is not necessary, but most children will do it if the adult closes their own eyes. If the child cannot concentrate with their eyes closed, however, offer them an object such as a picture or a battery-operated candle to focus on.
- You can add on to this activity by teaching the child small, gentle yoga stretches to use. Children especially enjoy doing Downward Dog, Child’s Pose, Mountain Pose, Star Pose, and Cat-Cow stretches. Instructions for these common yoga positions are readily available online. You can also purchase child yoga cards.
- If the child is going to do yoga, have them use a yoga mat to help reinforce the activity. Make sure the mat is small enough for the child to use and store independently. If you have yoga cards, store a few in a basket that’s accessible to the child. Have the child take the basket to the mat and use the cards as a guide for their yoga poses.

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Quiet Time *continued*



Indirect Benefits

- This activity builds the child's concentration because the child has to focus on staying quiet. Also, having an object to focus on during the quiet time may let the child discover something new and exciting about the object. Asking the child to listen for different noises also builds their concentration.
- The child will be excited and proud as they are able to stay quiet for longer periods of time. In addition to helping to relax the child's nervous system, this activity also teaches the child valuable skills to use if they are anxious about something.
- Rolling and unrolling a yoga mat exercises the child's fine motor skills.

