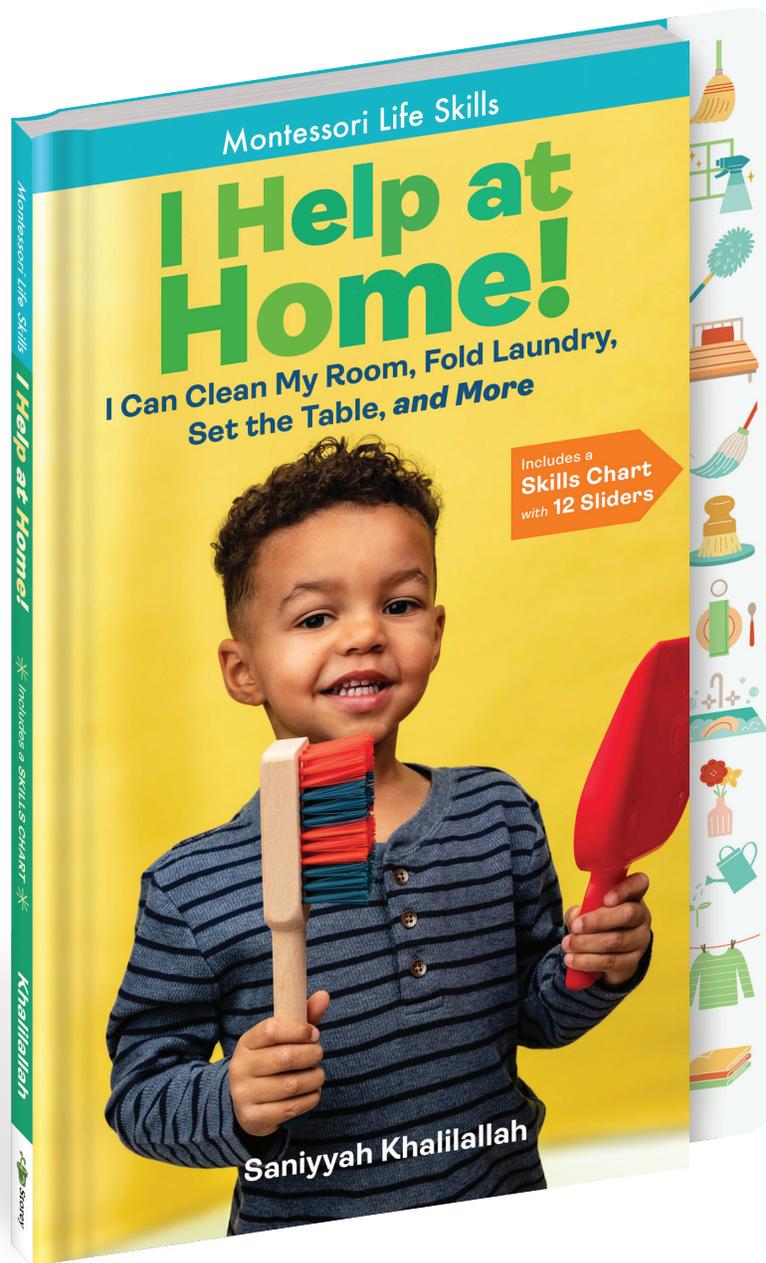




Guide for Grown-Ups



Look for *I Help at Home!* wherever books are sold.





Tips to Help Children Be Successful

with the Activities in *I Help at Home!*



The activities in the book *I Help at Home!* 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. Children will be able to use many of these skills, such as concentration and hand-eye coordination, 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.



You will be more likely to recognize the child's success and growth if you focus on the individual steps of each activity rather than rush the child to the end. For example, the benefits of the child scrubbing a table are not limited to a clean table! Gripping a scrub brush exercises fine motor skills and the motion of moving the brush across a table exercises gross motor skills. In addition, by following the steps in order, the child learns the importance of sequential operations and develops their concentration.



As the child learns, they will find it more helpful if you show and explain the correct way of doing something rather than point out that they have done a step or activity "wrong." As long as the child is out of harm's way, allow mistakes to happen. For example, if a young dishwasher forgets to wet the sponge before using soap, they will see that bubbles were not formed. They might be able to figure that out and correct the problem independently if you give them enough space to do so.

This not only gives the child an opportunity to practice problem-solving skills but also helps build the child's confidence. If the child doesn't realize on their own that the sponge should be wet before adding soap, allow them to continue with the activity. The next time they wash dishes, emphasize before they begin that in order to form bubbles, the sponge needs to be wet before adding soap.

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.



Sweeping

- If the child sweeps up real messes, the activity has more of an impact, so store the broom and dustpan in a place that is easily accessible to the child.
- Younger children who are still developing cross-body motions will benefit from using a push broom because pushing is an easier motion than moving an object across the body. If you notice the child pushing a standard broom instead of sweeping from side to side, switch to a push broom.
- Using a floor brush may be even easier than a push broom for a child who is still developing certain muscles and movements.
- To help younger learners, try drawing a circle with chalk on the floor where you want them to sweep the dirt. They can wipe off the chalk guide with a wet cloth when they are finished sweeping.
- Holding the dustpan at the same time as sweeping the dirt in may require some practice for the child at first. You might need to hold the dustpan to let the child focus only on sweeping in the dirt.

Indirect Benefits

- The cross-body action used in sweeping is a prerequisite for reading. When a child reads, their eyes have to move from side to side, crossing the midline of the body. Using this motion at a young age allows the child to practice skills they will later use in reading.
- Gripping the broom strengthens fine motor skills, while the side-to-side movement exercises gross motor skills.





Washing Windows

- Either the child or adult can be responsible for filling up the spray bottle and replacing the towel, but keep the basket of materials stocked and prepared so the child always has access to the materials. To eliminate the need for a basket, you could instead store materials on a shelf next to the window or next to where you keep your cleaning supplies.
- The squeegee is optional. A great alternative is to use a page from a newspaper or a piece of an old bedsheet to wipe the window.
- If you do use a squeegee, make sure it fits in the child's hand. If the squeegee is too big, consider cutting the edges to make the rubber part a little shorter.
- If the child is using a squeegee and you notice the towel becoming wet during this activity, gently suggest to the child that they get a clean, dry towel.
- The spray bottle can be a recycled cleaning solution bottle that is small enough for the child's hands to maneuver.
- Fill the spray bottle with either water or a child-safe solution for cleaning windows, such as vinegar and water.
- If you notice the child getting water on themselves during this activity, add an apron to the basket to prevent wet clothes.

Indirect Benefits

- Holding the squeegee and using the spray bottle develop fine motor skills, strengthening the same muscles that are needed to hold a pencil correctly. Every stroke or wipe on the window exercises the child's gross motor skills.
- The child will develop concentration as they carefully make sure to clean every smudge off the window.





Dusting

- The child can use either a duster (shown above) or a dry towel for this activity.
- If necessary, the child can also use a spray bottle. This method requires a towel so the child can wipe excess water from the surface.

Indirect Benefits

- Having the child place the items they remove from the surface onto a floor mat helps keep the child organized and centered and prevents the items from getting lost.
- Moving from left to right while dusting familiarizes the child with the basic eye movement needed in reading.
- The child exercises gross motor skills as they slide the duster or towel along the shelf. Gripping the duster or towel and using a spray bottle strengthens the child's fine motor skills.
- The child builds concentration as they focus on cleaning a shelf or area.





Cleaning My Bedroom

- To make cleaning the room easier, have the child place their toys on a small rug whenever they are “working” or playing. This helps center the child and prevents toys from getting all over the room. The rug should be small enough that the child can roll it up and store it somewhere in their room. In addition, make sure the child puts away each activity or toy before starting another one. This small step helps keep the child’s space organized.
- You can also introduce vacuuming as an option if the bedroom floor is carpeted. If the bedroom floor is not carpeted, you can have the child sweep and mop the floor.
- You can also introduce making a bed. Because a young child is still developing fine and gross motor skills, you might have to help them pull the sheets over the mattress.

Indirect Benefits

- Because there are many steps involved in cleaning the bedroom, the child has a chance to practice doing activities in a specific order and learn executive functioning skills, which will prepare the child to independently complete academic tasks, among other things.
- The child also develops concentration, which allows them to focus on other activities, including academics, for longer periods of time.
- Building on the previous activities in the book gives the child confidence knowing that they can do specific jobs correctly. This is how children learn to scaffold skills. Look for other opportunities in your community or family to help the child build on previously learned skills.
- Physically, the child exercises both fine and gross motor skills while cleaning their room.





Mopping

- Instead of a standard mop, you might try a Swiffer or another kind of mop-pad device. The child can remove and replace the cleaning pads.
- Whatever device you choose for the child's mopping, store it in a place that is accessible to the child throughout the day. Ideally, this will be next to the adult-size mop to show the child that they are a part of the community or family.
- Most often children mop up spills from liquids, so for most cleaning it may not be necessary to prepare a bucket of water. If you are using a mop but not a bucket, make sure the mop head is thoroughly damp before the child uses it. To dampen a detachable mop head, run it under water in the sink or tub. In addition, occasionally clean the mop head by running it through the washing machine.
- A standard hand towel is another great substitute for a mop when cleaning up a spill. Have the child spread the towel out and use two hands to push it over the spill.
- You may wish to add a child-safe cleaning solution to the mop bucket; vinegar is a great option. This will require some additional preparation on your part. Either measure out the vinegar in a small cup or allow the child to pour the vinegar into a container with a line clearly marked to show the child when to stop pouring the vinegar.

Indirect Benefits

- Pouring water from a pitcher into a bucket gives the child a chance to practice hand-eye coordination.
- While mopping, the child is developing skills that will prepare them for reading. The side-to-side movement of mopping requires the child to cross the midline of the body, just as their eyes will move from side to side to read.
- The side-to-side movement of mopping also exercises gross motor skills, while gripping the mop with two hands strengthens fine motor skills.





Scrubbing the Table

- Either you or the child can set up the table-scrubbing materials, placing them on a plastic place mat instead of on a hand towel if desired.
- Cut a regular-size sponge in half to make the sponge more accessible for little hands. Children feel more confident when they are able to easily manipulate objects.
- If the sponge is dry, direct the child to dip it in the water basin to get it wet. Show the child how to wring out the sponge over the basin. (See Washing Laundry on page 17 in this online supplement for wringing tips.)
- Many children tend to get very involved in this activity's scrubbing! Have the child wear an apron and be prepared for spills, soapy hands, and a lot of concentration.
- Keep towels of different sizes on hand for the child to clean up spills. Have a large hand towel to wipe up anything on the floor and a facecloth to dry the table and wipe out the basin at the end of the activity. Make sure the child knows where to put wet towels—either in a laundry basket or hanging to dry.
- Have the child replace the clean, dry towels after the activity is done. This step is part of preparing the environment and allows them to contribute to the community or family.
- The Mopping activity on page 12 in the book is another great way for the child to clean up a spill if one is made while completing this activity.
- Introduce the option of having the child scrub an object such as a bike, toy, or large seashell in addition to, or instead of, scrubbing a table. Follow the same steps as for table scrubbing but change the scrubbing section so it is adaptable to the item.

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Scrubbing the Table *continued*



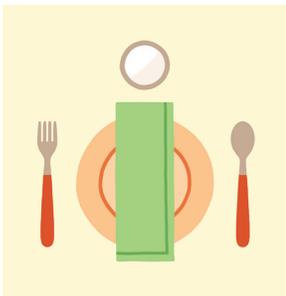
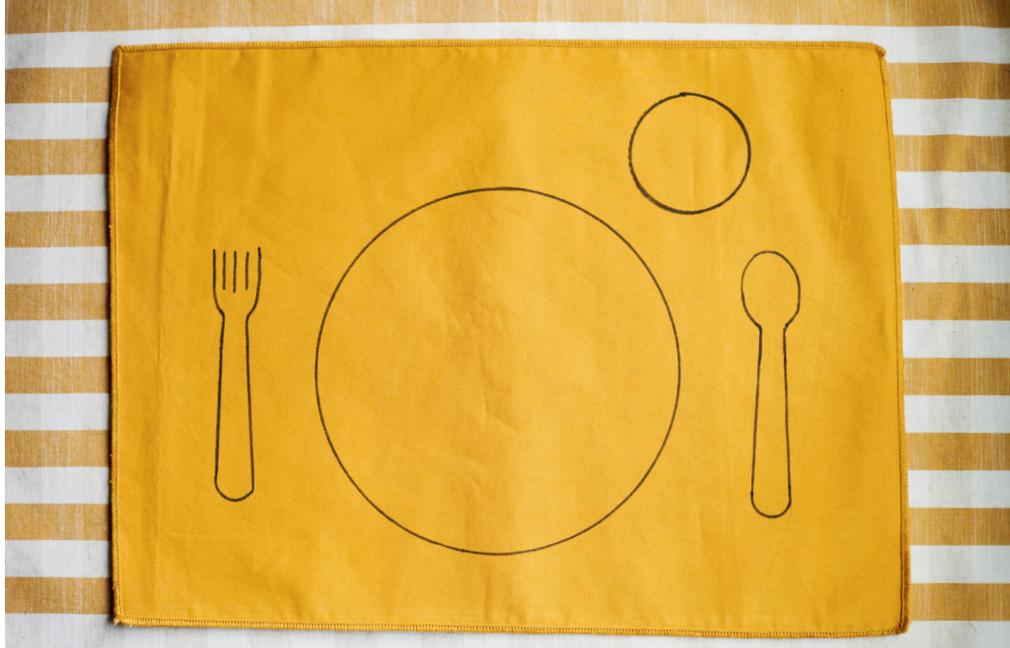
Indirect Benefits

- While setting up the activity and going through the steps, the child develops sequencing skills. For example, if the child misses the step of rubbing soap on the brush, there will be no soap on the table when it comes time to scrub. The child will see that a step was missed and will understand the purpose of following a sequence. This skill is important in many future academic areas, such as operations in mathematics. For example, if the child does not set up an equation correctly then the operation cannot be successfully fulfilled.

Also, noticing that a step was missed shows that this activity encourages *self-correcting*. The child will see the mistake they made and will correct it on their own. When a child is able to solve a problem independently, they learn the lesson or skill more completely while also developing confidence.

- Pouring water from a pitcher into a basin gives the child a chance to practice hand-eye coordination.
- The circular motion of the scrubbing helps the child strengthen both fine and gross motor skills.
- Scrubbing in a circular motion from left to right prepares the child for reading by having them practice starting at one side and moving toward the other side.





Setting the Table

- All the items needed to set a table can be made accessible to the child to cater to his or her independence by having them in a low drawer, cupboard, or shelf. These items should be stored with the dishes that adults use. The more the child can imitate the adult (including taking dishes from the same area), the more comfortable the child will feel because they will know they are an essential part of the community or family.
- The child can set the table for themselves or for a group of people. Either way, it is important to give the child a reference for the number of plates and pieces of silverware to set out. For example, if you use chairs as the reference and there are two chairs at the table, the child knows to set two table settings.
- Younger children may need more guidance, so you could use a place mat that shows where each item belongs, as seen above.
- Keep the cup behind the plate, even during meals, to help prevent spills.
- Once the child has mastered basic table setting, add items such as a tablecloth, flowers in a small vase, or knives to give the child additional skills to learn.

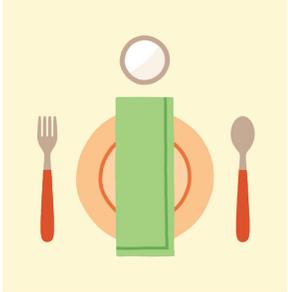
Indirect Benefits

- The process of setting the table introduces the child to rudimentary mathematics concepts: One chair to one plate to one spoon to one fork to one cup gives the child a concrete idea of one-to-one correspondence. This exposure will eventually help the child understand the abstract concepts in mathematics. For example, the numeral 9 is an abstract symbol that can represent a concrete quantity, such as nine pieces of candy.

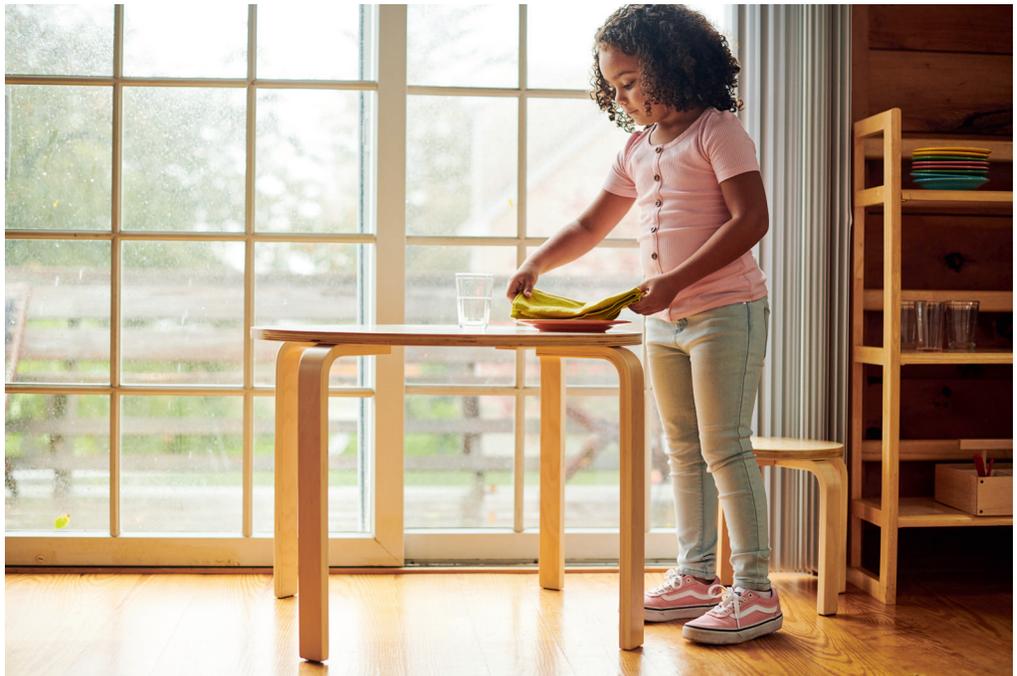
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Setting the Table *continued*



- Setting the table allows the child to practice order. Young children crave order and predictability, and knowing what comes next gives them a sense of security. Instructing the child to place a plate, then a cup, then a napkin, and so on will fulfill that need for order. In addition, learning that each item gets placed on the table in a particular sequence will help the child later to master new tasks that require step-by-step instructions.
- The child has to maneuver around the table and chairs to make this activity successful. The problem-solving skills the child exercises during that process make them more independent in their environment in general.
- Retrieving the dishes and placing them on the table exercises multiple motor skills. The small movements needed to hold onto each dish develop fine motor skills, while the big movements involved in setting the table develop gross motor skills.





Washing the Dishes

- Fill a travel-size bottle with a small amount of dish liquid. Put out only as much soap as you are happy for the child to use or emphasize using only one pump of soap.
- If the child cannot reach the sink, provide a step stool that is easily accessible for the child.
- Allow the child to watch you using the soap appropriately, being careful not to squeeze too much soap on the sponge.
- Show the child how to make bubbles with the water and soap in order to wash dishes.
- Have the child wear an apron if you notice water getting on their clothes.
- Instead of allowing the dish to air dry, try having the child dry it with a towel and place it where it belongs.

Indirect Benefits

- Squeezing soap onto a sponge, wringing water out of a sponge, and the motion of washing the dish exercise motor skills for the child. Practicing these fine and gross motor skills strengthens muscles that are needed for activities such as writing with a pencil.
- The child develops their concentration while washing the dish and by making sure all of the food and grease is removed.





Making a Bouquet

- Many children are drawn to the natural world and seem to appreciate the small things while playing outside. By bringing part of nature inside, this activity attracts the child's attention.
- You can often find small, inexpensive vases at thrift stores. Or, instead of vases, the child can use small cups, glasses, baby food jars, or other small containers.
- Providing multiple vessels will give the child the opportunity to practice all the skills in the activity and fill the environment with pretty flowers. There should be enough flowers in the large vase for the child to fill all the smaller containers that you provide.
- Offer the child a funnel that fits properly in the small vase to help them successfully pour the water.
- Make sure the scissors are strong enough to cut through a flower stem.
- Have the child measure several flower stems against the vase, then practice cutting each stem. This helps the child learn how to estimate where they need to cut the stems.
- Offer the child doilies to place under each vase for some added beauty.

Indirect Benefits

- Many children enjoy learning about nature, so you can easily build a simple science lesson into this activity. For example, try talking about the difference between living and nonliving objects and explain that flowers need water to stay alive. You can also teach the child names of different flowers and help them identify the parts of a flower.
- Pouring water from a pitcher into a vase (and maybe using a funnel for the first time) gives the child a chance to practice hand-eye coordination and concentration.

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Making a Bouquet *continued*



- The child can further practice their concentration skills when deciding which flowers to use, cutting a strong stem, and finding a place around the house to put the small vase.
- Measuring the flowers to fit into the vase introduces the child to the concept of length and prepares them for using a ruler, necessary skills in basic mathematics and other academic subjects.
- Using scissors exercises the child's fine motor skills and strengthens the muscles in their hands.





Caring for Plants

- Think about what you and the child want out of this activity. Is it important for the child to see quick results? If so, provide fast-growing plants that are easy to care for, such as spider plants and inch plants. Is it important for the child to regulate the watering independently? If so, provide plants with leaves that droop noticeably when the soil is dry, such as nerve plants, purple waffle plants, or polka dot plants. Is it important for the child to know that cleaning plant leaves is part of caring for a plant? If so, provide plants with leaves thick enough to withstand rubbing, such as rubber plants and snake plants.
- Keep a towel on hand in case a spill occurs while watering. If you'd like, have the child wear an apron to avoid getting their clothes wet.
- Use a small watering can that the child can maneuver. Have younger children, who might have difficulty gauging the amount of water poured into plants, use a spray bottle to spray the dirt. This can help prevent drowning the plant. If you do use a spray bottle, make sure the child's small hands are able to squeeze the handle successfully.
- Have the child use cut-up rags, a sponge, or a makeup applicator to wipe away the water sprayed on the leaves. If you don't have a spray bottle or the child doesn't have the hand strength to work the spray bottle, have them wipe off the leaves with a damp sponge instead.

Indirect Benefits

- Pouring water into a plant with a watering can uses big movements and helps exercise the child's gross motor skills, while squeezing a spray bottle requires small movements and helps exercise the child's fine motor skills.

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Caring for Plants *continued*



- Walking around the environment gets the child moving. This not only uses their muscles but also lets the child practice controlling their body around furniture, sometimes in tight spaces, as they reach for the plants.
- Looking for which plants need to be watered (by noticing drooping leaves) helps develop the child's focus and concentration and introduces them to some basic science concepts.
- The child's confidence will grow when they see the plant getting bigger because of the care they give the plant.
- If you'd like, add a small science lesson to help the child learn the difference between living and nonliving things by pointing out which nearby objects are living and which objects are nonliving.





Washing Laundry

- The adult will need to prepare this activity by setting up a laundry-washing station on a table large enough to fit two basins and low enough for the child to reach. Line the table with a waterproof mat or vinyl covering to protect it from water. In addition to the basins, set out a pitcher, a pump bottle of liquid soap small enough for the child to manipulate, a washing board, and plenty of towels for cleaning up spills.
- A cart that the child can use to push the laundry around the house helps make this activity more independent for the child.
- Water will get splashed around the area during this activity, so place a waterproof mat on the floor (in addition to the vinyl table covering) or have available an easy way for the child to clean up water.
- Children tend to spend some time on this activity, so have them use warm (but not hot) water in the basins so the water is comfortable for their hands.
- If a small brush is not available, the child can firmly rub the cloth on the washboard to clean the fabric.
- Have the child start out washing small towels and facecloths. Then, when the child feels comfortable using the washboard, offer them some items of clothing small enough to fit on the washboard.
- To wring out the towel, the child should use two hands moving in opposite directions (as seen above). Show the child how to turn one hand away from their body while the other hand moves toward their body.
- After the laundry is finished drying, have the child move on to the Folding Laundry activity (see page 26 in the book).

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Washing Laundry *continued*



Indirect Benefits

- Washing laundry involves many steps, which gives the child an opportunity to develop their sequencing skills. Understanding how to follow a sequence of events prepares the child for academic lessons, such as mathematics, that require steps to be done in a certain order.
- Pouring water into the basins helps the child practice their hand-eye coordination.
- Concentrating on not spilling the water—both while the child is pouring from the pitcher into the basins and while the child is scrubbing and rinsing—centers them and helps them focus on the activity.
- Wringing out the towel not only gets rid of extra water but also exercises fine motor skills in the child’s hands.
- To help engage an older child in this activity, have a conversation about the appropriate temperature for the water.
- For many children, knowing that they were part of the process of cleaning their clothes makes getting dressed more fun. This is especially helpful to keep in mind for a child who has a hard time getting ready in the morning.





Folding Laundry

- It is easier for a child to learn to fold using square or rectangular items such as towels, washcloths, or cloth napkins rather than clothing. Teach the child to use the corners as guides in their folding. Once the child can successfully fold towels, move them on to folding clothes or anything else in the laundry basket.
- Make sure you have a big enough space for folding, such as a large table or a special folding rug placed on the floor or the bed. The surface should be large enough for the child to fully spread out the item to be folded.
- If you put your wet clothes in the dryer instead of letting them hang dry, the child may enjoy feeling the warmth of the clothes fresh out of the dryer!
- Remember: Putting the clothes away is part of the process of folding clothes. Teach the child that the activity is completed when all the clothes are back where they belong.

Indirect Benefits

- Folding exercises the child's fine and gross motor skills while also teaching them independence.
- Because the child must focus on the folding in order to finish the activity, they build concentration.
- Folding a towel can introduce the child to basic fractions. Explain to the child that they start by folding the towel in half. Continue by saying something such as, "Now let's fold the towel in half again, making fourths!"
- Once the child is successful at folding towels, you can have them move on to folding paper and making fractions.

