

Can Work Independently

What does “Can Work Independently” mean?

This skill is about a child’s ability to work alone on a task given by an adult. The task should be something that children understand and are able to do by themselves without the adult constantly monitoring or reminding them what to do. A child that demonstrates this skill stays focused and tries to do the task alone or with the help of a peer before asking for help from the adult. This skill is important because it helps children build the confidence and ability to work on their own.

TIPS for TEACHERS

How can I explain this skill to children?

Tell children that now that they are in kindergarten, they are growing up! A great thing about growing up is that you can do more things on your own. For example, when they were babies, they couldn’t walk or feed themselves. But now that they are big kids, they do those things for themselves. Tell them that they will keep learning how to do new things until they are able to do lots of things for themselves! Give them an example of something they are still learning how to do but will one day be able to do on their own (like tie their shoes). Express excitement over the fact that they will be able to do that task without any help some day (for example, say: “Imagine that! One day, I won’t have to help you tie your shoes anymore. You will be able to do it all by yourself!). Let them know that you are there to help them when they are learning something new. Once they get better at it, they won’t need as much help and soon they will be doing a lot of things for themselves!

What are some examples of best practices from educational experts and fellow teachers?

TIP1








Set clear goals for independent work time. Young children are still learning to do things on their own and still need structure around independent work. When giving them independent work, make sure that you set a clear expectation for how much work they should do on their own. For example, let children know that they will be writing their numbers for the next 15 minutes. Tell them you want them to try on their own for the first 5 minutes before they ask for your help. Giving them a set period of time to work on their own makes it feel more manageable. Remember to use visual or audio indications of how much time is left for a task (see Tip 2 under “Completes work on time” for more ideas). It is also helpful to make independent work goals realistic. For example, it would be realistic for a kindergarten child to work for 10 minutes alone before asking for help but would not be realistic to tell them to work on their own for 30 minutes.

TIP2

Model self-talk. When children are having difficulty working independently, there is usually a cause behind it. You can help them identify barriers to working independently and easy solutions by modeling self-talk. For example, if you are writing a lesson on the board, you can get distracted by something you see outside. While you are writing, you could look outside and then say: “Oh, it’s raining outside. Did I remember to bring my umbrella today? ...Oops! I am getting distracted. I am supposed to be writing on the board. I should stop looking out the window, turn around, and focus on what I’m writing.” After you have finished writing, you can say: “It’s sometimes easy to get distracted when you are working! The rain distracted me. But then I remembered I had work to do and changed where I was looking and what I was thinking about. And that helped me get my work done!”

TIP3

Use checklists as reminders. For tasks that the entire class is expected to do on their own, it can be helpful to post checklists around the classroom as reminders of the steps involved in doing something. This reminds children what they are supposed to do without them having to ask for your help. Brainstorm a list of tasks that children are expected to do on their own in your classroom. It can be helpful to do this with your class, so that children feel ownership over those tasks and know what they are expected to do independently. Walk through the steps by modeling them at the beginning of the year and then reviewing them at strategic times (e.g., after holidays). It is also helpful to put the checklist in a specific area of the room. For example, post a checklist like this near the sink to prompt children about washing their hands.

Our Clean Hands Checklist		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Turn on the water	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wet your hands	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Get some soap and rub Your hands together	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wash the soap off	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Turn off the water	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grab a towel	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dry your hands	

How can I encourage children when I see them trying to learn this skill?

Acknowledge children for their efforts! For example, say, “Ling, I saw you working really hard to do that all by yourself” or “You did a great job working on your own, Kevin.”

To learn more about the tips and where they came from, please visit our references page: ckphilly.org/citations