

Functional Independence Checklist: Building Toward Independence

In Occupational Therapy, we begin working on activities of daily living as early as possible.

As we develop a plan for what to teach and practice, we consider:

- Strengths – What your child does well?
- Needs – Where support is still required?
- Opportunities – What experiences are going to help build skills over time?
- Values – What matters most to your child and your family?

We then begin asking:

- What ideas or plans does your child express about their future?
- If your child is unable to identify this independently, what skills do you think will be important for them to develop? What types of activities, whether for work or leisure, do you think they might enjoy?
- What skills will help them get there?

From there, skills are taught, practiced, and gradually built over time across school, home, and community environments.

Exploring Types of Skills and Levels of Independence

Instructions: Consider each skill and select the level of support that best reflects your child's current abilities. Focus on what your child does most of the time across home, school, and community environments.

Some skills may not yet be relevant based on your child's age, developmental level, or current opportunities. If a skill is not applicable at this time, simply leave it blank or make a note to revisit it in the future. You may also wish to highlight skills that are important priorities for your family or skills you would like your child to begin developing over time.

The purpose of this checklist is not to identify what your child cannot do, but to better understand their current strengths, support needs, and potential areas for future growth.

Note: These checklists can also be filled out by teenagers or young adults who wish to explore their strengths and where they may need support to reach their life goals.

Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)

Skill	Independent 100% Self / 0% Help	Needs a Little Help 75% Self / 25% Help	Needs Some Help 50% Self / 50% Help	Needs a Lot of Help 25% Self / 75% Help	Dependent 0% Self / 100% Help
Dressing (including fasteners and clothing selection)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Toileting and hygiene	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bathing/showering	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Grooming (hair, teeth, deodorant)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feeding/eating	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Personal device management (glasses, hearing aids, etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs)

Skill	Independent 100% Self / 0% Help	Needs a Little Help 75% Self / 25% Help	Needs Some Help 50% Self / 50% Help	Needs a Lot of Help 25% Self / 75% Help	Dependent 0% Self / 100% Help
Meal preparation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Household cleaning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Laundry	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Money management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Shopping/purchasing items	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Phone/technology use	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Scheduling appointments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Community mobility/transportation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Safety and emergency awareness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Health Management

Skill	Independent 100% Self / 0% Help	Needs a Little Help 75% Self / 25% Help	Needs Some Help 50% Self / 50% Help	Needs a Lot of Help 25% Self / 75% Help	Dependent 0% Self / 100% Help
Participates in health routines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Understands personal health needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Takes medications appropriately	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attends appointments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recognizes illness, injury, or stress	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Uses strategies to support wellness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Education

Skill	Independent 100% Self / 0% Help	Needs a Little Help 75% Self / 25% Help	Needs Some Help 50% Self / 50% Help	Needs a Lot of Help 25% Self / 75% Help	Dependent 0% Self / 100% Help
Follows classroom routines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Completes assignments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organizes school materials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Participates in learning activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Advocates for support at school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Work – Foundational Work Skills

Skill	Independent 100% Self / 0% Help	Needs a Little Help 75% Self / 25% Help	Needs Some Help 50% Self / 50% Help	Needs a Lot of Help 25% Self / 75% Help	Dependent 0% Self / 100% Help
Follows directions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Maintains attention	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Completes tasks	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Accepts feedback	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Works with others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Problem- solves when stuck	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Transitions between tasks	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Work – Employment Readiness

Skill	Independent 100% Self / 0% Help	Needs a Little Help 75% Self / 25% Help	Needs Some Help 50% Self / 50% Help	Needs a Lot of Help 25% Self / 75% Help	Dependent 0% Self / 100% Help
Completes applications	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Interview readiness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Understands workplace expectations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Manages work schedule	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Uses transportation for work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Leisure

Skill	Independent 100% Self / 0% Help	Needs a Little Help 75% Self / 25% Help	Needs Some Help 50% Self / 50% Help	Needs a Lot of Help 25% Self / 75% Help	Dependent 0% Self / 100% Help
Participates in preferred activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explores new interests	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Engages in physical activity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Uses free time meaningfully	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Social Participation

Skill	Independent 100% Self / 0% Help	Needs a Little Help 75% Self / 25% Help	Needs Some Help 50% Self / 50% Help	Needs a Lot of Help 25% Self / 75% Help	Dependent 0% Self / 100% Help
Initiates interactions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Maintains conversations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Maintains friendships	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Resolves conflicts appropriately	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Participates in groups/community activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Advocates for needs and preferences	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Executive Functioning & Self-Regulation Skills

Skill	Independent 100% Self / 0% Help	Needs a Little Help 75% Self / 25% Help	Needs Some Help 50% Self / 50% Help	Needs a Lot of Help 25% Self / 75% Help	Dependent 0% Self / 100% Help
Organization	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Time management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Task initiation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Task completion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Emotional regulation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Flexible thinking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Planning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Self- monitoring	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Are There Factors Affecting Participation?

Sometimes difficulties with daily activities are not caused by a lack of skill. Other factors may make participation more challenging. Identifying these barriers can help families and providers develop effective supports and intervention strategies.

- ☐ Sensory processing differences
- ☐ Executive functioning challenges
- ☐ Emotional regulation challenges
- ☐ Communication challenges
- ☐ Physical or motor challenges
- ☐ Health-related factors
- ☐ Environmental barriers
- ☐ Other: _____

Reflection Questions

- How do these factors affect my child's participation in daily activities?
- Which occupations are most impacted?
- What supports or accommodations might help?
- Are these factors being addressed across home, school, and community settings?

Understanding Skill Development

Some skills may not seem relevant today, particularly for younger children. A preschooler is not expected to manage medications, complete job applications, or independently use public transportation. Rather than focusing only on the final outcome, it can be helpful to think about the smaller skills that develop over time and eventually support adult independence. The examples below illustrate how early experiences can become the foundation for future opportunities, participation, and choice.

Examples of Skill Progression Pathways

The examples below demonstrate how small, age-appropriate experiences can grow into larger skills over time. Rather than focusing on a child's age, focus on where they are currently functioning and what the next step may be. The goal is not to rush children toward adulthood, but to intentionally build skills that support future opportunities, independence, and choice.

Independent Meal Preparation (IADLs)

Beginning Skills

- Uses a spoon and fork
- Helps stir ingredients
- Carries items to the table
- Participates in simple kitchen routines

Developing Skills

- Gets own snack
- Makes simple snacks
- Helps prepare meals
- Cleans up after eating

Advanced Skills

- Follows recipes
- Uses kitchen appliances safely
- Plans simple meals

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- Assists with grocery shopping

Adult Outcome

- Plans meals, shops for ingredients, and prepares meals independently

Community Mobility and Transportation (IADLs)

Beginning Skills

- Walks safely with an adult
- Follows basic safety directions
- Identifies familiar locations

Developing Skills

- Crosses streets safely with supervision
- Learns community safety rules
- Navigates familiar environments

Advanced Skills

- Uses public transportation with support
- Plans simple routes
- Navigates community settings with increasing independence

Adult Outcome

- Uses transportation and accesses the community independently

Meaningful Employment (Work)

Beginning Skills

- Participates in household chores
- Follows simple directions

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- Completes routine tasks

Developing Skills

- Completes multi-step activities
- Accepts feedback
- Demonstrates responsibility and persistence

Advanced Skills

- Volunteers or participates in work experiences
- Learns workplace expectations
- Completes applications and interviews

Adult Outcome

- Obtains and maintains meaningful employment

Self-Advocacy (Social Participation)

Beginning Skills

- Makes choices
- Expresses wants and needs
- Requests help when needed

Developing Skills

- Identifies preferences
- Communicates feelings
- Participates in decision-making

Advanced Skills

- Understands strengths and challenges
- Requests accommodations or support
- Participates in goal setting

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Adult Outcome

- Advocates for needs, preferences, and goals across settings

Health Management

Beginning Skills

- Participates in hygiene routines
- Communicates pain, discomfort, or illness

Developing Skills

- Identifies personal health needs
- Participates in healthcare visits
- Understands healthy habits and routines

Advanced Skills

- Understands medications
- Participates in healthcare decisions
- Practices wellness routines independently

Adult Outcome

- Manages healthcare needs, appointments, and medications independently

Remember: A child does not need to perform an adult task to begin developing the skills needed for adulthood. Small, age-appropriate experiences today often become the building blocks for future independence.

Next Steps: Turning Insight Into a Plan

Once you understand your child's current skills, work with providers and schools to align supports with both short-term and long-term goals.

Questions to consider:

- Who needs to be part of my child's team?
- Are goals aligned with long-term independence?
- Are skills practiced across settings?
- Are supports being reduced over time?
- Is my child developing self-advocacy skills?
- Are we practicing real-life skills regularly?
- Is the team aligned on priorities?

Closing Thought

It's not just about what skills a child has—it's about whether those skills are being built in a way that supports the life they want to live.

"Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together."
— Vincent van Gogh