



Age Appropriate Hygiene for 3 to 5 Year Olds

Children ages 3 to 5 are able to start taking on some personal hygiene tasks themselves. Use the following information as a guide to help your child begin to assume some self-care responsibilities. Remember, your child is new to these tasks and will need your help to make sure they fulfill the task appropriately. Role model hygiene-related behaviors and incorporate hygiene-related tasks into everyday routines to encourage skill development.

Hand Washing

Hand washing should typically occur before handling food or eating, when caring for your own or someone else's sickness, after using the toilet, or after touching an animal. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that individuals lather and wash their hands for approximately 20 seconds. Incorporate a child's song (e.g., ABC song) into the task to get your child to wash their hands for the recommended amount of time. If soap is not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.



Brushing Teeth

Brushing teeth should occur twice daily, typically once in the morning and evening. Children should start brushing as soon as they have teeth, and at the age of 3 to 5 years, should brush with a pea-size amount of fluoride toothpaste with supervision and assistance. Allow your child to take on the responsibility once they have mastered the skill to handle brushing alone. Monitor the amount of toothpaste they use, so they do not swallow too much fluoride, which could damage their teeth over time.

Combing and Brushing Hair

Children with short hair can master this skill early and with little effort. Practice role-modeling skills so your child can mirror your actions. Children with longer hair may need help combing their hair and manipulating hair ties or barrettes. Allow your child to help pick out hairstyles or barrettes so they can feel included in the process. Children with textured hair, such as curly or kinky hair, may need parents to administer additional treatments to keep their hair healthy and tangle-free.





Getting Dressed

Beginning very early in life, children can play a role in getting dressed. Getting dressed is especially important in potty training as children need to maneuver pants and bottoms as they use the toilet. Keep in mind that children ages 3 to 5 years old are still developing fine motor skills and may need help with buttons, snaps, and zippers. At this age, opt for clothing with elastic or stretchy waistbands.



Using the Toilet

Children ages 3 to 5 years old have either started using the toilet or have already been doing it for some time. Dress your child in clothing that is easy to remove, and help them learn to dress and undress so they may use the toilet independently. Children this age will need help cleaning themselves after a bowel movement. Continue encouraging independence and teach your child the skills until they have mastered cleanliness. Children should always wash their hands after using the toilet.

Taking a Bath

Always supervise children ages 3 to 5 years old when taking a bath. While they will still need help bathing (e.g., regulation of water temperature), they are ready to start learning how to wash themselves and work up to independence in the bath. Teach them how to use soap and shampoo, scrub the various parts of their body, and rinse and dry properly. Encourage bathing and cleanliness by making bath time fun and allowing time for play.



Sources:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>

American Dental Association: <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en>

Additional resources, skills, and strategies for parents are available at no cost through the online Thrive Initiative programming. Visit the Thrive website <https://thrive.psu.edu>, and sign up today!