

Tips for Including Toddlers in Self-Care Routines

- **Washing hands.** Minimizing the spread of germs and creating good habits are the adults' goals for hand washing. Children, on the other hand, are more interested in exploring the water, the soap, and their independence when washing their hands. Each time you help your children wash their hands, include a few seconds or minutes so they can explore the water and soap. When washing hands is a playful enjoyable experience, it will feel less like a required task that you have to remind children to do.
- **Brushing teeth.** It takes a lot of practice to learn how to brush teeth really well. Brush your children's teeth in front of a mirror so they can see what you are doing. As you brush your children's teeth, describe how you are moving the brush and name the parts of their mouth, for example, by saying "Now I'm brushing your front teeth, back and forth." Include time for children to move the brush around over their teeth using just water.
- **Getting dressed.** Invite your child to complete portions of the task of getting dressed and undressed such as pulling off socks, unstrapping shoes, pulling pants down, unzipping footie pajamas, and so forth. Periodically offer new simple tasks that they might be able to do.
- **Bathing/face washing.** Just like hand washing, children need time to explore the water and soap. In addition, offer children a small washcloth and remind them of places that need to be cleaned to include them in the process — even if you have to do some extra wiping at the end to get the spots they missed.
- **Eating.** While it can take practice and can be a little messy, offer children child-sized dishes and silverware so they can practice feeding themselves. Start with foods that are easier to control; for example, yogurt is easier to scoop and bring to your mouth in comparison to very runny soup. If a spill occurs, give the child a paper towel or a washcloth to help clean up the spill.
- **Toileting.** Learning to use the toilet happens at a different time for each child. Observe for your child's interest in using the toilet; offer chances to sit on the toilet; notice when your child has stayed dry between diaper changes; and if you are comfortable, let your child see you using the bathroom. Remain calm and positive through the toilet learning process, and remember that the "right time" for every child varies.

