

SELF-CARE SKILLS

Programming in the area of self-care skills is essential for many individuals with disabilities. Skills such as toilet training, cleaning and grooming, dressing and undressing, personal safety and drinking and eating are skills of daily living that need to be mastered if the student is to become an accepted and functioning member of society. In addition, individuals with disabilities must learn how to manage emergency situations and act safely as they perform these life skills. The following reasons have been offered as a rationale for priority programming in self-care skills:

- The student who is physically and developmentally capable of being toilet trained, but for some reason has not been trained, will be excluded from many social and community interactions.
- The student who is not functionally independent in drinking and eating will require supervision that may become burdensome to some parents, teachers and staff. Furthermore, required care may not be available as the student becomes older. Moreover, he or she will be greatly limited in opportunities for positive social interaction, leisure and productive work experiences.
- The student who is not functionally independent in dressing and undressing skills will require significant amounts of attention from parents, staff and teachers. Attention to the mechanics of self-care, if it continues for many years, will take time away from teaching those higher-level skills involved in functional academics, communication and social interaction. The development of social interaction skills will be restricted if inordinate attention must be given to personal care experiences.
- The student who lacks essential cleaning and grooming skills invariably will be denied or excluded from many interpersonal and social experiences.
- The student who acts in an unsafe manner will create problems for him-or herself, parents and teachers, resulting in reduced opportunities for independence, inclusion and integration into less restrictive programs.

Proficiency in self-care skills helps students with disabilities develop responsibility for their personal needs and enhances their self-esteem. It also increases the likelihood that others will view them as acceptable friends, co-workers, peers and acquaintances. Functional independence contributes to successful participation in the home, neighborhood, society and, hopefully, to a greater level of financial independence.

Although self-care skills must get early attention in school, they should not be given unique or prolonged emphasis at the expense of other curricular areas. Repeated concentration on these fundamental skills can result in monotonous school days for students and teachers alike. A variety of instructional experiences is important, especially when teachers are programming in the area of self-care. Burnout, an increasing problem in high-stress teaching assignments, is a less likely result of instructional programming that is multidimensional and varied.

This information is an excerpt taken from A Functional Curriculum for Teaching Students with Disabilities (Volume 1, Third Edition) by Michael Bender, Peter J. Valletutti, and Carol Ann Baglin, Pro-Ed publisher.

