

Backwards Chaining

When teaching a new skill, as adults we often start at the beginning. This can be a challenge for children, especially those struggling to master a skill. Another way of learning a new task is to use a technique called 'backwards chaining. It allows the child to feel a sense of achievement and can be used with anyone who has difficulty learning new skills or tasks, regardless of their age.

Backwards chaining starts by breaking a task down into small steps. You teach the child the very last step, working backwards from the end goal. So, you as the adult complete all the steps except the last, which the child practices. The child enjoys the success of completing that step, so once they have mastered it, you teach them the second to last step. Once they can complete the last 2 steps independently, then you can teach the one before, and once they master that step, you can continue working back through the steps until the first step of the task, and they complete the whole activity independently. The child feels success and pride at every part of the task, which is often the motivation they need to continue trying, especially when things are challenging to them.

The backwards chaining technique is particularly useful if you are trying to teach your child to get dressed or undressed. Below, these dressing and undressing tasks are already broken down into steps, but this technique can be used for other tasks. The general process is at the bottom of this document.

Example of Putting a T-shirt on using the Backward Chaining Method

- First, you break the task down into steps. Here are the steps of putting on a T-shirt.
 - a. Lay the t-shirt front side down on the bed/floor/table with the lower edge nearest to your child.
 - b. Pick the back of the t-shirt up and place it over your head.
 - c. Push one arm through the sleeve.



T-shirt



THERAPY SERVICES

- d. Push the other arm through the sleeve.
 - e. Pull the t-shirt down.
- Now follow this process for backward chaining.
1. Child completes last step (e)
 - You lay the t-shirt down.
 - You pick up the t-shirt and place it over your child's head.
 - You hold out the first sleeve and put their arm through the sleeve opening.
 - You do the same with the other arm and the second opening.
 - Teach your child to pull down the t-shirt.
 2. child completes last 2 steps (d and e)
 - You lay the t-shirt down.
 - You pick up the t-shirt and place it over your child's head.
 - You hold out the first sleeve and put their arm through the sleeve opening.
 - Teach your child to push their second arm through the sleeve opening.
 - Your child pulls down the t-shirt.
 3. Child completes last 3 steps (c, d, and e)
 - You lay the t-shirt down.
 - You pick up the t-shirt and place it over your child's head.
 - Teach your child to hold the first sleeve and put their arm through the sleeve opening.
 - Your child pushes their second arm through the sleeve opening and pulls down the t-shirt.
 4. Child completes last 4 steps (b, c, d, and e)
 - You lay the t-shirt down.
 - Teach your child to pick up the t-shirt and place it over their head.
 - Your child pushes both arms through the sleeve openings and pulls down the t-shirt.

5. Child completes all the steps (a, b, c, d, and e)

- Teach your child to lay the t-shirt front side down on the bed/floor/table with the lower edge nearest to them.
- Your child picks up the t-shirt and places it over their head, pushes both arms through the sleeve openings and pulls down the t-shirt.

Steps for some other everyday activities

• Putting on Pants:

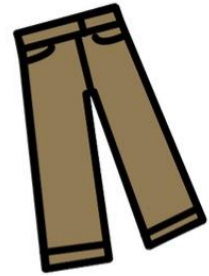
- Sit on floor, bed or chair.
- Hold pants by waistband, label at the back, picture (if applicable) at the front.
- Lower pants and lift one leg into pant hole.
- Put other leg into the second pant hole.
- Pull pants up to knees.
- Stand up and pull pants up to waist.



Pants

• Putting on Trousers:

- Sit on floor, bed or chair.
- Hold trousers by waistband, look for label at the back.
- Lower trousers and lift one leg into hole.
- Put other leg into the second hole.
- Pull trousers up to knees.
- Stand up and pull trousers up to waist.



Trousers

• Putting on Socks:

- Sitting on the floor with back against the wall or on a chair.
- Hook both thumbs into opening of sock and hold onto edge.
- Push toes into sock.
- Lift foot and pull sock over heel.



Socks

- Pull sock up leg.
- Putting on Shoes:
 - Sitting on the floor with back against the wall or on a chair.
 - Slip shoe over toes.
 - Place the index finger inside the heel of the shoe and pull the shoe the rest of the way over their foot.
 - Place foot on the floor and stand up to push foot down into shoe.



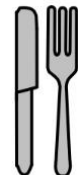
Shoes

This backward chaining method can also be used for other activities i.e. using cutlery.

- Using a Spoon
 - Hold the spoon in one hand.
 - Hold the bowl/plate in the other hand.
 - Scoop the food.
 - Bring the spoon to your mouth.
 - Put the spoon into your mouth.
 - Remove the food from the spoon using your lips, tongue and teeth.
 - Remove the spoon from your mouth.
 - Repeat.
- Using a Knife and Fork
 - Hold the fork in your helping hand and hold the knife
 - in your dominant hand.
 - Stab the food with the fork and press down.
 - Saw back and forth with the knife.
 - Eat the cut-up food.



Spoon



Knife and Fork

Process of Backward Chaining

- The first step in backward chaining is to break the task down into steps. It can help to do the task and write down each action in turn.
- Now complete all the steps of the task except for the last one for your child.
- Now you need to teach your child the last step. You can help your child by showing them, telling them or doing the action with them.
- Practice, practice, practice this step until your child can do it without your help.
- Now complete all the steps except for the last two for your child.
- Teach them the second last step and let them complete the last step.
- Once they have mastered the second last step, complete all the steps except the last three for your child, teach them the third last step and let them do the last two steps themselves.
- Repeat until they can do all of the steps.



Instructions