

Backward Chaining Technique



When teaching a new skill we often start at the beginning. This can be challenging for children who are struggling to master a skill. One way of learning a new task while giving your child a sense of achievement is to use the backward chaining technique. Backward chaining has been found to be particularly useful when learning self-care skills. It can also be helpful when teaching younger children and those who have difficulty learning new skills. So what is backward chaining? You start by breaking the task down into small steps. You teach your child the last step first, working backward from the goal. You complete all of the steps except the last one and have your child practice the final step. Your child will enjoy the success that comes from completing a task. Once your child has mastered the last step you complete all of the steps except for the last two. You teach your child the second from last step and they then complete the last step themselves. Even more success! You continue like this until you are teaching the first step and your child is completing all the other steps.

This is a particularly useful technique to use when teaching a child how to get dressed or undressed. This technique can also be helpful for teaching any task that has a number of steps.

Here is the list of steps for you to use when you want to try the backward chaining technique.

1. 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. Below are some examples of the steps for a number of common tasks.
2. Now complete all the steps of the task except for the last one for your child.
3. 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. See the Occupation section for more information.
4. Practice, practice, practice this step until your child can do it without your help.
5. Now complete all the steps except for the last two for your child.
6. Teach them the second last step and let them complete the last step.
7. Once they have mastered the second last step, complete all the steps except the last three for your child and teach them the third last step and let them do the last two steps themselves.
8. Repeat until they can do all of the steps.

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.

Steps for Putting on a T-Shirt



- Lay the t-shirt front side down on the bed/floor/table with the lower edge nearest to your child.
- Pick the back of the t-shirt up and place it over your head.
- Push one arm through the sleeve.
- Push the other arm through the sleeve.
- Pull the t-shirt down.

Now follow this process for backward chaining.

First Time:

1. You lay the t-shirt down.
2. You pick up the t-shirt and place it over your child's head.
3. You hold out the first sleeve and put their arm through the sleeve opening.
4. You do the same with the other arm and the second opening.
5. Teach your child to pull down the t-shirt.

Second Time:

1. You lay the t-shirt down.
2. You pick up the t-shirt and place it over your child's head.
3. You hold out the first sleeve and put their arm through the sleeve opening.
4. Teach your child to push their second arm through the sleeve opening.
5. Your child pulls down the t-shirt.

Third Time:

1. You lay the t-shirt down.
2. You pick up the t-shirt and place it over your child's head.
3. Teach your child to hold the first sleeve and put their arm through the sleeve opening.
4. Your child pushes their second arm through the sleeve opening and pulls down the t-shirt.

Fourth Time:

1. You lay the t-shirt down.
2. Teach your child to pick up the t-shirt and place it over their head.
3. Your child pushes both arms through the sleeve openings and pulls down the t-shirt.

Fifth Time:

1. Teach your child to lay the t-shirt front side down on the bed/floor/table with the lower edge nearest to them.
 2. 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.
- Your child can now put their t-shirt on independently.

Steps for Some Everyday Activities

Putting on Pants:



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- 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.

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.

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.
- Pull sock up leg.

Putting on Shoes:



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- 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.

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.