Encouraging Independence in the Early Years

Small Steps That Build Confidence

‘I can do it!’ is a familiar phrase in the toddler years. Whether trying to put on shoes, use a spoon or choose a favourite book, young children are beginning to discover what they can do for themselves. Offering patient encouragement helps independence grow alongside confidence and a sense of belonging.

Why Independence Matters

Small everyday responsibilities can make a big difference to how children see themselves and approach new experiences.

Confidence

Achieving something independently gives children a sense of pride and encourages them to try again. That confidence can help them approach unfamiliar experiences with curiosity.

Practical Life Skills

Simple tasks help develop coordination, concentration and growing self-care abilities.

Decision-Making

Making manageable choices helps children understand their preferences and develop a voice. Adults can make choices easier by keeping the options simple and safe.

Resilience

Having time to try, make mistakes and receive support teaches persistence and flexibility.

Five Ways to Build Independence

1. Allow Extra Time

Give your child space to attempt simple tasks without feeling hurried. Getting started together can help if a task feels too difficult.

2. Offer Two Clear Choices

Choosing between two suitable outfits or books supports decision-making. Either option should be one you are happy for them to choose.

3. Encourage Self-Feeding

Let your child practise using utensils, with help when needed. Mealtimes may be messy, and that is a normal part of practice.

4. Involve Them in Routines

Putting toys away or finding shoes creates opportunities to contribute. Small contributions help children feel part of their family or group.

5. Praise Effort, Not Perfection

Acknowledge the attempt, even when a task still requires adult support. Sometimes the most helpful response is, “Shall we try together?”

Nurturing Independence at Dovecote

At Dovecote Nursery, we encourage children to take an active role in their day. Through age-appropriate choices, accessible resources and familiar routines, children have opportunities to develop independence naturally.

Our team offers gentle guidance and reassurance, recognising that each child learns new skills at their own pace and that asking for help is part of learning too.

Independence grows through small, supported experiences and the confidence to keep trying.