



What Are Adaptive Skills and Why Are They Important?

Joachim is a 3-year-old who is eager to help with tasks around the house. He likes to put napkins on the table for seder, and he likes to pour out a puzzle on the floor for play time. He likes to get himself dressed to go for a walk in cool weather with his bubbe (grandmother).



Joachim is growing and learning each day. He can meet his own needs in new ways that he couldn't do without help before. He is learning skills that will lead to taking care of himself and others as an adult. These “adaptive” skills are those that children use to explore and thrive in their daily activities.

Adaptive skills are also important in other areas of development. In our story, here is how Joachim might be using adaptive skills in thinking, interacting, moving, and playing.

- Joachim uses adaptive thinking skills and observations in several ways. He decides what to do with the napkins, he advocates for what he likes to do with the puzzle, and he remembers to put on his warm coat before going outside.
- Joachim might be using adaptive interacting skills with his caregivers by using words to listen and respond as he communicates about family traditions and fun activities. We can imagine him laughing with his caregivers. Laughter is an adaptive connecting skill that starts young and is used all our lives.
- Joachim uses adaptive moving skills by independently taking action to participate in plans for the day. He is learning how to fold the napkins, open the puzzle box, and put on his coat. He needs less help than he did when he was a baby!
- Joachim uses adaptive playing skills. He plays to learn more about what he likes and doesn't like to do, to imitate how his caregivers do things, and to try new things and see what happens.

Adaptive skills in young children are essential for their daily functioning and overall development. Some additional examples of adaptive skills that children learn over time include:

- babbling to get a caregiver's attention,
- getting another diaper,
- brushing teeth (with help),
- braiding hair,
- pulling up socks,
- scooping a favorite family food into a bowl,
- telling a caregiver when they are hurt,
- asking for help,
- comforting someone who is crying,
- and sharing toys with a new friend.

Children are born with incredible brains that help them learn new skills quickly. Children listen, observe, watch, feel, and experience everything around them. As they grow, they can do more and more on their own, with adaptive tools that meet their needs.

During his early years, Joachim is learning all the time. He learns how to do more things for himself with activities like eating, moving his body, cleaning up his toys and books, and helping his family with routines. One day, these adaptive skills will help Joachim navigate school or his first job and help his family and community with challenges and celebrations. These skills will help him live his happiest life.

For more information on supporting your child's adaptive development, visit [HelpMeGrowMN.org](https://www.helpmegrowmn.org) and click on Encouraging Healthy Development.