

What you will learn in this module

How to use health rules and routines to promote wellness

Health rules and routines help children learn the habits they need to stay healthy and infection-free. Frequent hand washing and clean up routines reduce the spread of infection. They also teach children the importance of good hygiene.

How to meet the self-help needs of children with disabilities

Like all children, those with disabilities want to be independent. But they need help to manage self-care. Some may need adaptive equipment or additional support to learn dressing and eating skills. Others may need to increase their tolerance of different textures so that they can maintain a healthy diet.

How to foster good mental health

Caring relationships with adults help all children gain the confidence they need to meet life's challenges. When caregivers are respectful and show an interest in what they are doing, children feel safe and in control. They can rely on adult support to help them manage their feelings and behavior.

You already know a lot about keeping children healthy

You know that following health rules help children stay well.

Health rules protect children from infectious diseases. Children learn good health habits when these are part of everyday activities and routines.

Children with disabilities usually have needs similar to those of their peers. If a child has a special health care need, her parents will tell you what to do.

You know that preschool-aged children want to be independent and take care of themselves.

Preschool is the time when children take the first steps in caring for their body on their own. They practice self-help skills like hand washing, toothbrushing, and bathroom hygiene. They are proud that they can do things for themselves.

Children with disabilities want to be independent, too. But they may need more support in order to do things on their own. Some need a toileting schedule to stay continent. Some need step-by-step pictures to wash their hands or brush their teeth. These supports help children feel proud. They allow them to care for themselves in an independent, grown up manner.

You know that relationships with caring adults help children learn how to manage their emotions and behavior.

Young children need adults to help them understand the world around them. Adults help them learn to regulate feelings and behavior. Good teachers help children carry on the process of self-discovery that they began at home.

Self-awareness and self-control come easier to some children than others. Peers often reject a child who acts in odd or aggressive ways. This is a serious threat to the child's sense of well being. Whether she has a disability or not, she needs lots of positive behavioral support. Without it she won't grow and flourish with her peers.

Staying Clean and Healthy

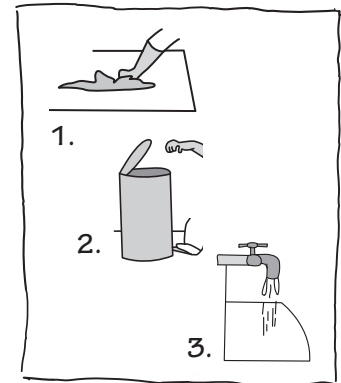
As you read this story notice how Ms. Walker uses a picture sequence to teach children to follow a good health habit routine.



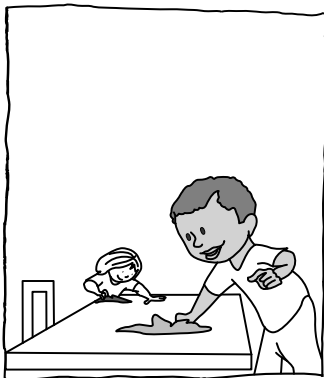
Ms. Walker: "Okay, let's start cleaning up."



Ms. Walker: "Joey, can you and Maddy clean up the tables?"



Ms. Walker: "First we wipe down the table, then throw away the trash, then wash our hands."



Ms. Walker: "The last step is washing our hands. The picture board helps us follow the routine!"

 **What do you think?**

Mr. Ortega's just enrolled Arthur, a boy with an immune system disorder. Arthur gets sick easily, so Mr. Ortega wants to do everything he can to keep the classroom infection-free. His director told him that a simple bleach solution would do the trick. Mr. Ortega wonders if he should be doing something more. *What would you tell him?*

- (a) Your director is correct. A simple bleach solution will keep any surface infection-free.
- (b) Your director is just trying to save money. It is probably worth your while to buy a commercial cleaner and some air sanitizing sprays to be on the safe side.
- (c) There's not a whole lot you can do to control infections. Maybe Arthur should stay home until he's stronger.

The correct answer is (a). Daily use of a bleach solution keeps toys and surfaces infection-free. Other cleaning products are not needed.

Disability, not disease

Teachers sometimes worry that children with disabilities are sick and require daily medical care. Most children with disabilities do not.

"It always surprises me when people think children with disabilities are sick," said Ms. Walker.

"I'm not surprised," replied Ms. Creegan. "People treated my sister as if she was sick. I used to wonder if parents wouldn't let their children come to our house for fear they'd catch autism."

"One of my directors used to call that kind of thinking the 'germ theory of disability,'" said Ms. Alvarez. "She was always talking about how you can't catch a disability. She'd say 'A disability is not a disease! Get over it!'"