

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Teaching independent living skills with realistic goals

"Independent" was always the wrong word. Nobody does laundry, cooking, or hygiene entirely alone; they do it with habits, reminders, and tools nobody calls assistance because it's invisible. Supported competence is the honest goal. Here is how to build it in steps small enough to actually stick.

BY JIM PALASTY · 13 MIN READ · REDEFINING THE GOAL ITSELF

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PARTS OF THE METHOD

Break the skill into micro-steps. Build a prompt-and-fade plan. Redefine independence as supported competence.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Break it down

Turn one overwhelming task into a sequence of micro-steps small enough to teach one at a time.



STEP 2

Prompt, then fade

Start with full physical or verbal support. Remove it deliberately, one level at a time, as each step sticks.



STEP 3

Call it competence

A visual checklist and a standing reminder are supports, not failures. Name the goal honestly.

Sample task analysis: brushing teeth

Step 1	Pick up toothbrush from designated spot.
Step 2	Turn on water, wet bristles.
Step 3	Apply pea-sized toothpaste.
Step 4	Brush each quadrant, roughly 30 seconds each.
Step 5	Rinse brush, rinse mouth, spit.
Step 6	Return brush to designated spot.

A STORY WE KNOW



Owen's mother spent three years trying to teach him to "do his own laundry" and gave up twice, convinced he'd never manage it independently. A new support worker broke it into eleven micro-steps and taught one every two weeks, fading physical prompts to a laminated picture checklist taped inside the machine lid. Fourteen months later, Owen does his own laundry weekly, checklist in hand, no adult present. His mother stopped calling the checklist a failure the day she realized she still uses a recipe card for the one dish she's cooked two hundred times.

THE CHECKLIST WASN'T THE WORKAROUND. IT WAS THE PLAN WORKING EXACTLY AS DESIGNED.

What matters, at a glance

Task analysis

Write the full sequence of micro-steps for one task. Most tasks that look like one step are actually eight to twelve.

Most-to-least prompting

Start with full physical support, fade to a gesture, then a verbal cue, then nothing. Remove support only after a step is solid.

The independence myth

Nobody is independent. Everyone uses lists, alarms, habits, and other people. Demanding "fully independent" sets an impossible bar nobody actually clears.

Supported competence

The honest, achievable goal: performing the task reliably with whatever level of support makes that reliable, permanently if needed.

Teach one at a time

Add a new micro-step only once the previous one is solid. Rushing the sequence is the most common way a plan stalls.

Visual checklists count

A laminated card taped to the mirror is a legitimate permanent support, not a sign the plan failed.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

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| ☐ A written task analysis for the target skill | ☐ A prompt hierarchy: physical, gesture, verbal, none |
| ☐ A simple tracking sheet for which steps are solid | ☐ Materials for a visual checklist or picture schedule |
| ☐ Patience for teaching one micro-step at a time | |

YOUR MOVE

When a skill feels stuck, here is how you restart it at the right size

- 1 Pick one stalled task and write its full micro-step sequence.
- 2 Identify exactly which micro-step is the sticking point.
- 3 Add full support at that one step only, not the whole task.
- 4 Fade support one level at a time as the step becomes solid.
- 5 Build a permanent visual support if that's what makes it reliable.
- 6 Celebrate supported competence as the actual, real goal achieved.

A skill taught in the right-sized steps sticks. The same skill taught all at once usually doesn't.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

lifecoursetools.com · <https://www.lifecoursetools.com/>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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