

Portage Top Tips to Support Your Child's Development

Top Tips

Teaching Your Child Using the Portage 'Small Steps' Approach

In Portage, we use the '**small steps**' approach to teach a new skill, building on what your child can already do and by starting with activities that your child is already showing interest in. Using small steps makes it easier for your child to achieve.

General Portage Tips:

- Start with activities your child is already showing interest in.
- Keep learning fun.
- Give praise (for e.g. clap hands/ high 5s) for every small new thing your child achieves.
- Tell your child what they have achieved to reinforce their learning, for example "Well done, you've zipped your coat up."
- Have short sessions of daily learning.
- Choose the best time for your child to learn a new skill (for e.g. avoid times when your child might be hungry or tired).
- Use different prompts to support your child, for e.g. Physical (such as hand on hand support); Gesture (such as pointing) and/or Verbal prompts.
- Work on one new skill for a week; repeating the same task in each daily learning session.
- Give your child time to practice each new skill independently before moving on to the next new challenge.

The Portage 'Small Steps' Approach

Before we start teaching new skills we spend time watching the child, to see just where 'they are at' (their '**Baseline**'). So, say you'd like your child to learn to put their coat on, in Portage this would be called a '**Long Term Goal / Target**' (something which your child will achieve bit by bit over the next few months).

First you would spend time thinking about the sorts of skills you would need to be able to do before you can start to teach putting on a coat. Or, think about what skills come before this stage, such as, taking 'easy undress' clothes off and then putting on 'easy dress clothes' (e.g. hats).

The next step or stage involved we call '**Task Analysis**'. By breaking down the task into '**small steps**' you can start to see if this is a good time to start teaching this target.

How many steps will it take to put on a coat? - The easiest way to answer this is to do it and note down each step; include things like finding the coat, pick up a coat and put it on (to give you an idea just how many steps we might break such a task down into, putting on a coat from picking it up to pulling up the zip might take between 20-30 steps!)

Once you have decided on the number of small steps, you can decide which step you might teach first, it is usually the easiest step we teach first, or the one that gives the most reward. So,

with the 'teaching to put on a coat' task, we might teach 'pulling up the zip' first or 'placing one arm in'. To transfer this to a simple building with blocks task, we might start with 3 blocks and ask a child to place the final block 'on top' after you have supported your child by building the first 2 blocks.

Teaching the last part of an activity your child will be rewarded by being the one to 'finish'. Gradually your child can be supported to complete additional parts of a task, slowly building up expectations and reducing the amount of support you give.

Ensure your child achieves success every time and celebrate together. Children love success and are more likely to repeat an activity if they succeed.

Check out more ['Portage Top Tips'](#) focused on teaching your child new skills in different areas of development on the NPA website.

Portage Workshops are run across the UK and are open to parents and early years practitioners. Learn more about [Portage training](#) near you by visiting the NPA website.