Tool No. 5: Checklist – Life Skills by Age

You don't have to teach everything all at once — but if you teach nothing, they'll leave home with nothing but attitude and anxiety. This checklist helps you build capacity in your child over time — not to create little adults, but to raise future humans who can function in real life. You don't need to check every box. You do need to keep going.

Ages 2–4: Let Me Try!

- Dress self (with help)
- Wash hands & face
- Tidy up toys
- Pour water from a small pitcher
- Carry own bag or water bottle
- Use manners: "please," "thank you," "no thank you"
- Begin expressing wants and needs with words

Ages 5–7: I Can Do It Myself!

- Make a simple snack
- Learn to tie shoes
- Pack own school bag
- Put away clean laundry
- Understand consequences of small actions
- Learn basic safety rules (crossing street, stranger talk)
- Begin helping with family chores (with reminders)

Ages 8–10: I'm Learning to Contribute

- Make a basic meal (sandwiches, pasta, breakfast)
- Use kitchen tools safely (toaster, microwave)
- Manage personal hygiene with minimal prompting
- Understand money basics (allowance, saving, spending)
- Clean shared spaces (bathroom wipe-downs, sweeping)
- Start solving friend conflicts with support
- Learn how to apologize and repair

Ages 11–13: I'm Becoming More Independent

- Use calendar or planner to track assignments
- Pack for overnight or sports events
- Learn basic emotional regulation (with support)
- Understand internet safety and screen boundaries
- Do laundry start-to-finish
- Speak respectfully to adults and peers (with reminders)
- Reflect on personal values and peer pressure choices

Ages 14–17: I'm Preparing to Adult

- Manage own schedule and commitments
- Cook multiple meals (protein, carb, veg)
- Know how to handle basic conflict (family, friends, work)
- Apply for jobs or volunteer opportunities
- Manage digital devices and privacy settings
- Book appointments or handle calls
- Understand consent, relationships, and emotional literacy
- Know how to ask for help

Ages 18+: I'm Building a Life

- Create and follow a basic budget
- Understand mental health and know when to seek support
- Maintain a clean, livable space
- Handle professional communication (email, resumes, interviews)
- Participate in healthy relationships (boundaries, respect, self-care)
- Reflect on personal purpose, goals, and how they treat others
- Keep learning, failing, and growing

Tip: Don't panic over what's missing. Use this list to spot your next teachable moment — not to grade your kid.

— Melissa | Parenting Dirty